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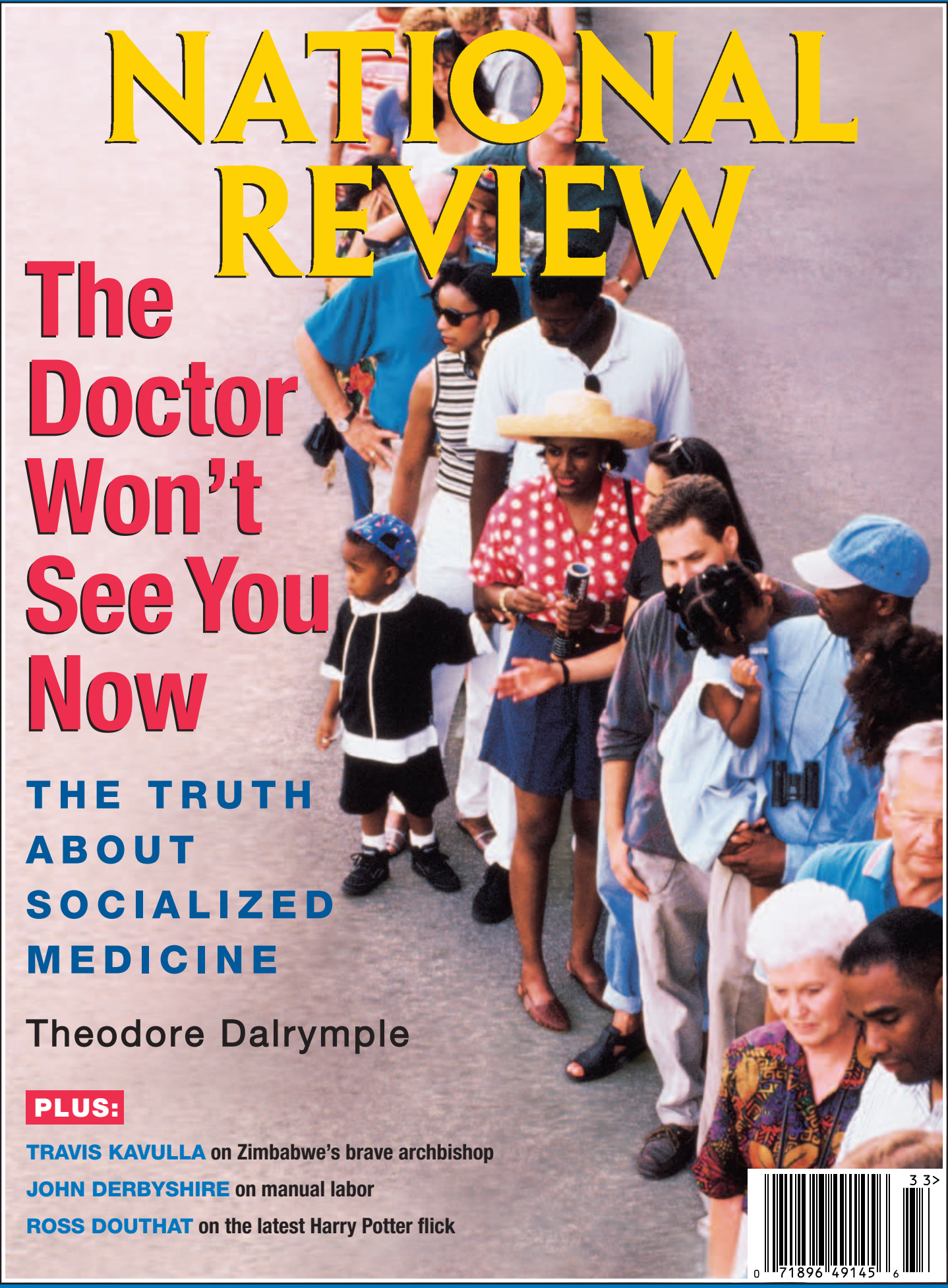

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Theodore Dalrymple

PLUS:

TRAVIS KAVULLA on Zimbabwe's brave archbishop

JOHN DERBYSHIRE on manual labor

ROSS DOUTHAT on the latest Harry Potter flick

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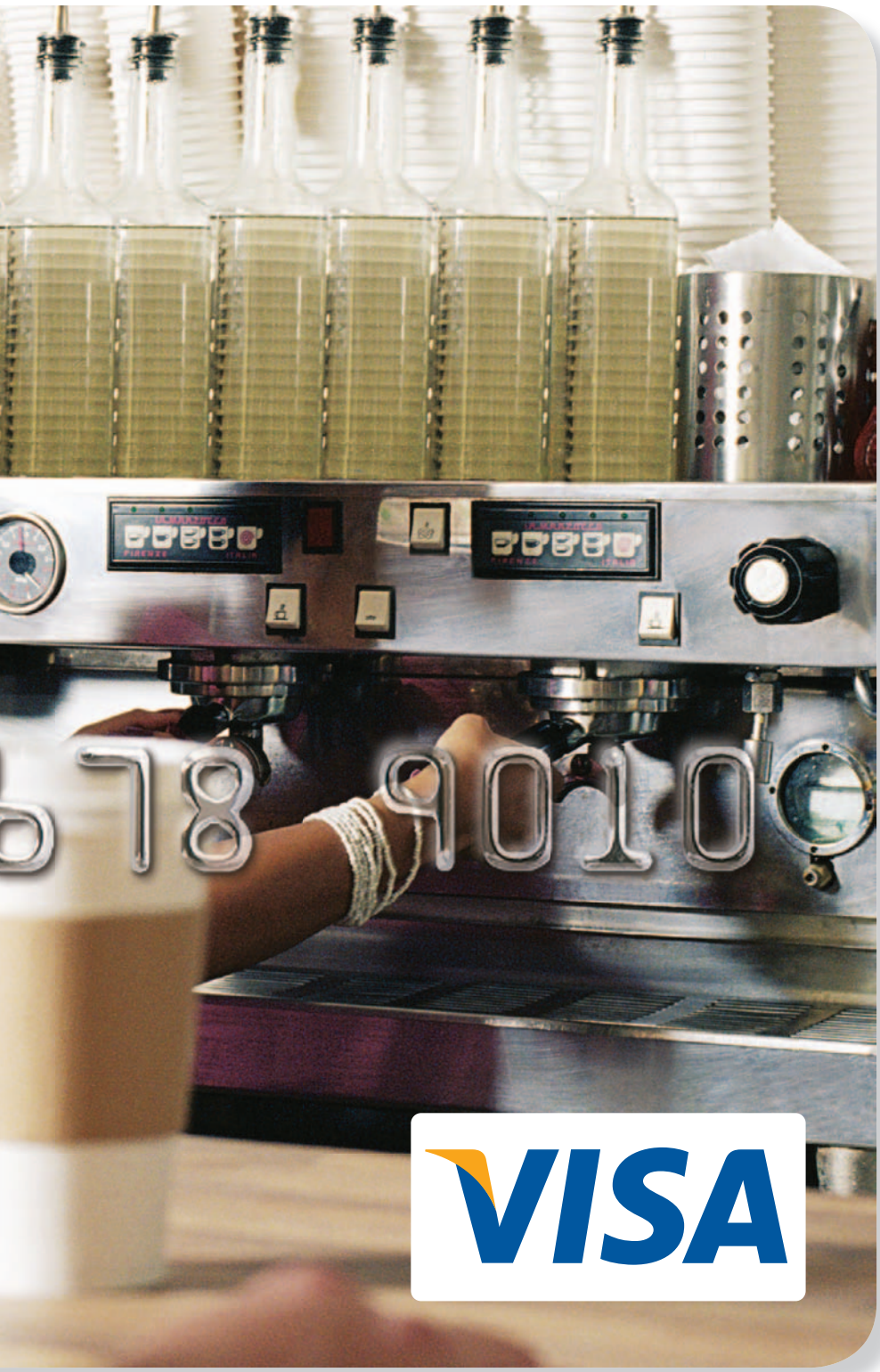

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NATIONAL REVIEW

AUGUST 13, 2007 VOL. LIX, NO. 14

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■ COVER STORY

Health of the State

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According to *Sicko*, Michael Moore's film about health care in America, the British and French sunbathe in the cloudless uplands of universal state-funded health care, while Americans struggle horribly in a muddy swamp to pay exorbitant costs for themselves. In particular, Moore's portrayal of Britain's National Health Service irritated me profoundly. Only someone intent on telling a lie could have presented the situation as he presented it. *By Theodore Dalrymple*

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NATIONAL REVIEW

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letters to the editor

DR. DEATHS

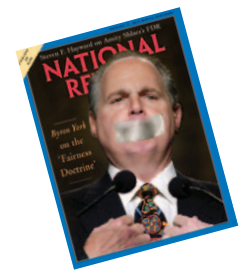
Theodore Dalrymple's article in the July 30 issue ("Cutthroats in White Coats") was spot-on. Especially insightful was the observation that, "for revolutionary violence to be sustained, it needs the leadership of an educated minority capable, because of its mental training, of rationalizing almost anything." Walker Percy wrote about this in *The Message in the Bottle*, pointing out that mass murderers seem otherwise normal, likable, and boring. Alfred Hitchcock depicts a cold and calculating ubermensch mentality in his movie *Rope*. The main characters murder a college chum, hide the body in a trunk, and proceed coolly to have a party with other friends, arranging the hors d'oeuvres trays on the very trunk wherein lies the corpse. I can't think of a better metaphor than this for those individuals who, behind the veneer of the kind, civilized pediatrician, harbor a deep and horrifying violence.

William J. Lassiter
Plymouth, Minn.

NOTHING TO LOSE

I read with interest Dr. Dalrymple's "Cutthroats in White Coats." I was once surprised that people with so much to lose could be involved several layers deep in terror cells. My friend, whose wife is a prominent surgeon, suggested that these doctors in Britain did not have so much to lose as they worked for the National Health Service. Ah, socialized medicine—I can hardly wait.

Jerry L. Brand
Albequerque, N.M.



BEWARE FAIRNESS

I hope the confidence Rush Limbaugh expressed in Byron York's "An Unfair Doctrine" (July 30) is justified—that the return of the Fairness Doctrine doesn't stand a chance. The Ivy League waters down grades, schools have for years refused to name valedictorians, and some sports leagues have done away with scoring altogether. In too many places already achievement and success are being scorned. This move to reinstate the Fairness Doctrine suggests yet another scheme by which liberals are trying to raise their self-esteem by diminishing the achievements of others.

Christian G. Farley
Clifton Park, N.Y.

CORRECTION

In our July 30 issue, Bing West's piece, "Battle of the Narratives," spoke of 20 decapitated bodies in Salman Pak, Iraq. This atrocity had been reported in various media. Later, however, Mr. West discovered that the story wasn't true—that this had been a "false plant."

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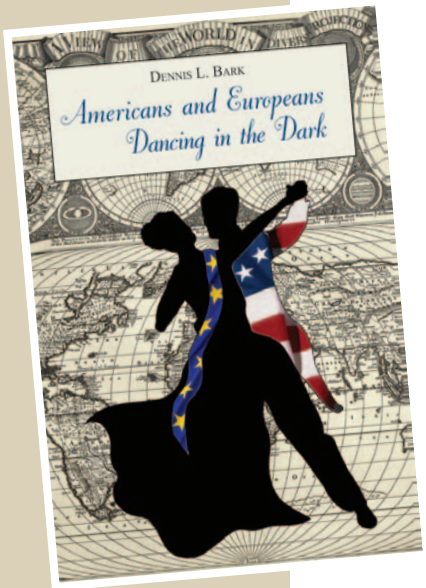

Why can't old friends see eye to eye?

Americans and Europeans — Dancing in the Dark

Dennis Bark offers an in-depth examination of the deteriorating relationship between America and Europe: our differences and affinities, the reasons behind our conflicts, and the future of our alliance. He identifies the essential difference between us, revealed in how Europe and America were built—from the top down and from the bottom up, respectectively.

He explains how this has shaped our historical views of the world as well as our modern interests and attitudes. If our relationship is to be saved, he asserts, we must learn what our essential differences teach us about ourselves and draw on our shared affinities to make us both stronger.

Dennis L. Bark, a senior fellow at the Hoover Institution, is a historian and political scientist in the field of European studies.

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THE WEEK

■ Elizabeth Edwards says that John Edwards is the most feminist candidate in the race. Not true: He does too much primping.

■ July was supposed to be the new September. Instead of waiting for Gen. David Petraeus to report on the state of the surge in Iraq in the fall, panicked Republicans—egged on by the media—seemed set to mandate withdrawal right away. But the predicted stampede never quite developed. Only four Republicans voted for a hard timetable for withdrawal, while GOP elder statesmen and inveterate compromisers such as Sens. John Warner and Lamar Alexander gravitated to halfway proposals that were incoherent on their face and were not defeatist enough to win significant Democratic support. Majority leader Harry Reid didn't help his cause with a stagy Iraq-debate sleepover that convinced wavering Republicans that the Nevada Democrat was more interested in scoring partisan points than in working with them. The upshot is that September is the new September, and General Petraeus got a little more of what he needs most from Washington: time.

■ The word "genocide" rolls trippingly off liberal tongues these days. Consider a recent *New York Times* editorial advocating withdrawal from Iraq: "There could be reprisals against those who worked with American forces, further ethnic cleansing, even genocide." Well, if *that's* all . . . Meanwhile, Barack Obama says that preventing genocide isn't reason enough to deploy U.S. forces, or we "would have 300,000 troops in the Congo right now." Obama and the *Times* are at best shallow, at worst callous and contradictory. The *Times* says that "keeping troops in Iraq will only make things worse" one paragraph after conceding that "Iraq . . . could be bloodier and more chaotic after Americans leave." Obama, for his part, seems not to have asked whether invading and occupying a country creates duties that watching from afar does not. Other liberals dogmatically assert that there is nothing we can do to ease the sectarian violence, and ignore the modest but unmistakable progress American forces have recently made toward doing just that. Leading Democrats have gone from accepting defeat to greeting possible genocide with a shrug.

■ Dick Gephardt started out pro-life but switched his position in time to run for president. Addressing an abortion-rights banquet, he blamed his past on the misfortune of having been raised in a "working-class family of Baptist faith." John Edwards, today's Democratic tribune of the working class, is using his religious background the same way: to protect his left flank. He says that same-sex marriage is the hardest issue he has to deal with. He is against it, he told George Stephanopoulos: "Because I'm 53 years old. I grew up in a small town in the rural South. I was raised in the Southern Baptist church and so I have a belief system that arises from that. It's part of who I am. I can't make it disappear. . . . Do I believe they should have the right to marry? I'm just not there yet, me, I'm not there." Edwards has transcended parts of his past: He has said that he does not believe homosexuality is immoral. But nobody votes on that question, while same-sex marriage remains unpopular. We're guessing that the operative word in his answer was "yet."

We recently read of a slight contretemps between Queen Elizabeth II and Annie Leibovitz, the famed photographer. Our Roman Genn imagines the scene.

ROMAN GENN

■ After passengers reported the suspicious behavior of six Muslim clerics on a US Airways flight last November, the clerics were questioned and cleared—and the passengers were slapped with a lawsuit. The Council on American-Islamic Relations has helped the "flying imams" file an accusation that the airline and the passengers engaged in a "malicious . . . conspiracy to discriminate" against them. Rep. Peter King, the New York Republican, is sponsoring an amendment to offer legal protection to anyone who reports suspicious behavior in good faith. The House has passed it 304–21, but most Democrats in both chambers opposed it, and their leaders had

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THE WEEK...

to be pressured into letting it stay in the homeland-security bill. Passenger vigilance is an essential component of our post-9/11 security procedures. Political correctness, backed by legal intimidation, should not be allowed to weaken that vigilance.

■ The *Washington Post* ran a front-page story on the administration's "bold new assertion of executive authority." Experts were quoted on how "astonishing" and "breathtaking" and "Nixonian" the administration's claim of executive privilege was, and Democratic senators got in the words "outrageous" and "constitutional crisis." (One expert who took the pro-administration view, NR's own David Rivkin, was also quoted, deep in the story.) The next day, on p. A3, the *Post* ran a story noting that some Democratic experts thought that the administration might just prevail and that the Clinton administration had taken the same legal position. Same writers; no trace of sheepishness. Here are the un-breathtaking facts of the matter. Congressional Democrats want to make current and former White House aides testify about their role in the "scandal" of the fired U.S. attorneys. The administration says, plausibly, that Congress cannot compel their testimony because presidents need to be able to get confidential advice from their subordinates on personnel matters. The new twist is that the administration is also saying that, if Congress holds these aides in contempt for refusing to testify, the Justice Department will not prosecute the aides. In other words, Congress cannot force the administration to drop its executive-privilege claim, and it cannot force the administration to prosecute people it believes are innocent of any crime. The reason the administration is likely to prevail legally is that, well, it's correct.

■ Finally there is a voice of reason in the CIA-leak case. It belongs to federal judge John Bates, who in mid-July threw out a lawsuit by Joseph Wilson and Valerie Plame Wilson alleging that Dick Cheney, Karl Rove, Lewis Libby, and several unnamed administration officials violated their constitutional rights by revealing Mrs. Wilson's employment at the CIA. (The Wilsons initially left former deputy secretary of state Richard Armitage out of the suit—funny, but they have never seemed truly outraged at the man who originally leaked Mrs. Wilson's identity—but later added him to the list of defendants.) Judge Bates ruled that Cheney, Rove, et al. were just doing their jobs in the CIA-leak affair, and thus cannot be sued for damages. Whatever one might think of their actions, Bates wrote, "there can be no serious dispute that the act of rebutting public criticism, such as that levied by Mr. Wilson against the Bush administration's handling of prewar foreign intelligence, by speaking with members of the press is within the scope of defendants' duties." How true.

■ In the last two years of the Clinton administration, the Republican Senate confirmed 15 appeals-court nominees. Today's Democratic Senate has, so far, confirmed only three of Bush's nominees. Sen. Patrick Leahy called the Republicans' performance "unacceptable" in 2000. As chairman of the Judiciary Committee, he is largely responsible for today's much slower pace. Judge Leslie Southwick of Mississippi is the latest victim of obstruction—and slander. He is being accused of racial insensitivity because he voted with the majority in a case finding that state law did not require the firing of a state employee for using the N-word. The state supreme court affirmed that decision. He is also being accused of hostility to gay people because, in a child-custody case, he joined another opinion that used the phrase "homosexual lifestyle"—a phrase that has also been used by such noted gay-bashers as Bill Clinton and Justice Anthony Kennedy—and pointed out that the state legislature opposed gay marriage, which is true. Now Leahy is saying that it would be better if Bush put up a black nominee. So that this new nominee can get the same treatment as Janice Rogers Brown and Clarence Thomas? Control of the judiciary is at stake in the next election. In the Southwick nomination, the Republicans should find a helpful illustration of the difference between the parties.

JONATHAN ERNST/GETTY

■ Rep. Keith Ellison (D., Minn.) compared 9/11 to the Reichstag fire in a talk early in July. "After the Reichstag was burned . . . it put the leader of that country in a position where he could basically have authority to do whatever he wanted." Ellison denied that he was a conspiracy theorist. "The fact is that I'm not saying [9/11] was a plan, or anything like that . . ." But his denial was tactical. ". . . because, you know, that's how they put you in the nut-ball box—dismiss you." In the Nineties, Ellison was a member of Louis Farrakhan's Nation of Islam, which teaches that white, yellow, and red people are the degenerate products of prehistoric breeding experiments performed on the island of Patmos by Dr. Yacub. The nut-ball box is a place he knows well.

■ House Democrats never have been known as tightwads, and the budget they just passed for the Department of Labor won't change their reputation: It spends about a billion dollars more than President Bush requested. One of the agencies within the department, however, doesn't share in this largesse: The Office of Labor Management Standards, which is responsible for the financial oversight of unions, will see its budget drop by more than $2 million. Its offense appears to be a job well done. Over the last six years, OLMS has implemented new disclosure requirements that give union members unprecedented amounts of information on how union leaders spend their dues. What's more, its investigators have worked with U.S. attorneys to help secure 775 convictions. Nancy Pelosi has spoken extensively about her commitment to ethics and transparency. It seems that she doesn't think labor unions need to share her values.

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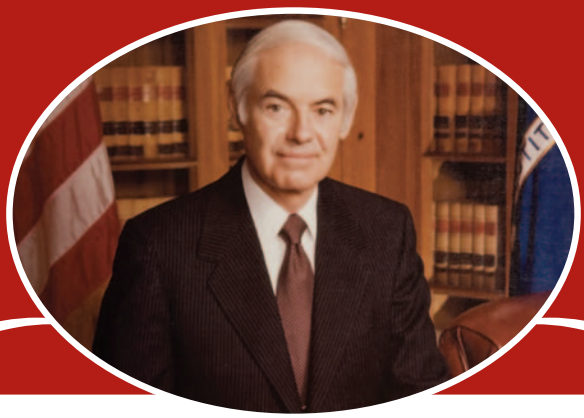

WILLIAM FRENCH SMITH

74th Attorney General of the United States

PEPPERDINE PAYS TRIBUTE TO BILL SMITH

Pepperdine University School of Law hosted A Celebration of the Life and Legacy of William French Smith on Friday, June 29, at the Ronald Reagan Presidential Library. Mrs. Ronald Reagan served as Honorary Chairperson.

The gala dinner event marked the establishment of the Pepperdine School of Law William French Smith Memorial Lectures on Law and the Judiciary. Dean Ken Starr noted that "the lectures will bring prominent speakers each year to focus on issues of law, the judiciary, and public policy so as to honor in perpetuity a singularly talented lawyer and public servant who, as President Reagan graciously said was, 'always honest, always fair, always careful, and always motivated by a desire to do what was indisputably the right thing.'"

Numerous distinguished speakers, who all served with or knew Bill Smith, spoke at the celebratory event: Ed Meese, Ed Schmults, Ted Olson, Judge Stephen Trott, Bob McConnell, Ambassador Jack Gavin, Pat Boone, and Judge Catherine Anderson all participated, along with those pictured above: Richard Willard, Carol Dinkins, Paul McGrath, Brad Reynolds, Judge Lowell Jensen, David Hiller, Dean Ken Starr, and keynote speaker Rudy Giuliani.

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THE WEEK...

■ Yes, the shutdown of North Korea's Yongbyon nuclear reactor was good news. But Kim Jong Il's threat has been reduced just barely, and the flaws in the February 13 deal between North Korea and the other participants in the six-party talks remain all too apparent. Thanks to A. Q. Khan, the highly entrepreneurial Pakistani nuclear scientist, Kim still owns uranium-enrichment equipment. And then there's the arsenal of atomic bombs he has already built. The deal reopened to Kim the conduits of foreign aid that keep his regime afloat while doing nothing to address these menaces. Defenders of the deal urge that Kim is still largely frozen out of the international financial system: The Treasury Department has tagged Banco Delta Asia, Kim's bank of choice in Macau, as an institution of "primary money-laundering concern." Fearing a similar fate, other banks subsequently refused to deal with Kim. But the Treasury Department could have issued its BDA ruling with or without the February 13 deal—and, for that matter, with or without the six-party talks. The Bush administration should be maximizing pressure on all fronts, not cranking it up here while pressing the escape valves there.

■ Bizarrely, the National Intelligence Estimate played in the press as a huge setback to the Bush administration. It said that the U.S. faces a "persistent and evolving terrorist threat," including from al-Qaeda in Iraq, al-Qaeda's "most visible and capable affiliate." The report was appropriately scathing about the safe haven that has been allowed to develop in western Pakistan (see below), but otherwise generally tracked with what Bush says almost daily about the dangers of the post-9/11 world. He is, as he says, a war president, and he is paying closer attention to the war than most of his critics.

■ Al-Qaeda is thriving in Pakistan, thanks to an ill-advised ceasefire deal that Pervez Musharraf cut with tribal leaders in 2006. The Pakistani army ceased military operations in exchange for a promise that militants would stop incursions

KCNA/AFP

A VAT of Trouble

THE economics literature has demonstrated that taxing consumption is preferable to taxing income. In a recent review of the literature that I coauthored with Berkeley economist Alan Auerbach, we found that a wholesale switch to a consumption tax would increase real GDP by about 10 percent over ten years. Put differently, GDP today may be about 10 percent lower than it would have been if we had adopted a consumption tax ten years ago. Accordingly, it is urgent that the United States move toward a consumption tax as soon as possible.

Consumption taxes come in many forms, but they have one thing in common: They impose taxes when income is consumed, but not when it is saved. This rewards savings, and spurs economic growth. The most common type of consumption tax worldwide is the Value Added Tax, or VAT. The VAT is employed by many countries around the world, and is compulsory in the EU.

As the accompanying chart indicates, European countries that rely on VATs have tended to increase them over time. The average VAT revenue in Europe increased from about 6.9 percent of GDP in 1995 to about 8 percent of GDP in 2005. Currently, standard VAT rates range from 15 to 25 percent.

An optimist might say that this increasing reliance on the VAT is a good thing, a form of gradual tax reform. Wholesale adoption of a national consumption tax is politically infeasible, but Europeans are gradually accomplishing sweeping change by increasing the VAT over time.

A pessimist, on the other hand, might say that the VAT is a nearly invisible sales tax. It increases over time to sate government's unquenchable thirst for revenue, and does so without generating even a faint whimper from taxpayers.

Which view is right? A 2003 paper by University of Chicago economists Casey Mulligan and Gary Becker provides strong evidence supporting the pessimists. Countries with VATs tend to use their ability to generate revenue relatively efficiently with a VAT to expand the size of government.

This suggests that those who support small government should resist the siren song of gradual tax reform. If the United States adopted a VAT, while retaining the rest of our tax code, then the VAT would provide politicians with a new and expandable source of revenue. While, in principle, those revenues could fund reductions in more distortionary taxes, in practice they would fund an expansion of government.

The history of the VAT suggests that a little bit of consumption taxation can be a dangerous thing.

—KEVIN A. HASSETT

VAT Revenues in EU Countries

SOURCE: EUROPEAN COMMISSION

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into Afghanistan. But the deal was not enforced against the militants. Musharraf seems finally to have realized, in the wake of the Red Mosque battle in Islamabad, that he was had. The U.S. should push Musharraf to meet al-Qaeda's challenge with force of arms, and strive to augment his capabilities through military cooperation and development aid. Only after the tribesmen have seen that a Western-oriented leader has brought security and relative prosperity will their loyalties shift. America also should encourage Musharraf to align the Pakistani military, which will remain the dominant force in the country for the foreseeable future, with Pakistan's secularist progressive parties, such as Benazir Bhutto's Pakistan People's Party. The Pakistani population as a whole feels little sympathy for extremists—Islamist parties would win only 5 percent of the vote in a fair election, according to most estimates—but before they can be defeated they have to be fought.

■ If the results of the Turkish election had been designed by a committee consisting of Henry Kissinger, Bernard Lewis, and Dick Morris, it could scarcely have come up with a more calming outcome. The election has given the ruling party, the moderate Islamic AKP, a parliamentary majority, but one that falls short of the two-thirds required to alter the secularist Turkish constitution. There would be massive voter opposition to anything that smacked of hard-line Islamism. It would be wise if the three main political players—the AKP, the floundering Kemalist establishment, and the highly respected armed forces—reached a compromise on the issue that provoked these elections, namely the selection of a new president. They might, for instance, agree on a socially conservative Muslim from outside the AKP. Such a compromise would reflect the evolution of Turkey from strict Kemalist secularism toward greater expression of religion in public life. Given that Turkey is 99 percent Muslim, that evolution is almost certainly inevitable with the deepening of Turkish democracy. It will need to be carefully managed and skeptically watched to ensure that the legitimate claims of secularism are protected. If it succeeds, however, it will be a useful demonstration to the entire Muslim world that democracy and Islam are not such odd bedfellows.

■ Venezuelan president Hugo Chávez does not take criticism well, a fact illustrated by his shutdown of RCTV, Venezuela's second-largest TV channel, earlier this year. Now, in a new effusion of *chavismo*, the Castro-hugging president has declared that foreigners who publicly criticize him or his government while visiting Venezuela will be expelled from the country. Speaking during his weekly TV program, Chávez asked rhetorically: "How long are we going to allow a person—from any country in the world—to come to our own house to say there's a dictatorship here, that the president is a tyrant, and nobody does anything about it?" Well, yes. Free speech is all very well; but those who use freedom of speech to assert that free speech is being silenced, should be . . . silenced. Everybody got that?

■ Vets for Freedom, a group made up of people who served in Iraq or Afghanistan, took to Capitol Hill the afternoon before Harry Reid's all-nighter. They attempted to convince senators to give Gen. David Petraeus and his new counterinsurgency strategy time to work. Vets for Freedom also intended its visit to serve as a counterprotest against several anti-war veterans groups that showed up to support Reid. The media, through their lopsided coverage of the latter, have conveyed the impression that the only vets speaking up about the war are angry, disillusioned, and ready to pull the troops out of Iraq. Liberals portray soldiers as the victims of Bush's policies. Vets for Freedom reminds us that most of them are warriors who believe in their mission.

■ "Scott Thomas," a pseudonymous soldier who files occasional pieces on life at the front in Iraq for *The New Republic*, had some particularly raw vignettes recently: soldiers laughing at a woman soldier or contractor disfigured by an IED; the discovery of a mass grave of children, which inspired another soldier to wear the crown of a skull for the rest of the day; yet another soldier who ran over dogs with his Bradley Fighting Vehicle. Will "Scott Thomas" join Stephen Glass in the *TNR* hall of fame? *The Weekly Standard* put out a call for military bloggers to confirm or deny the accounts, and some sound fishy: Hot-rodding in a Bradley is a good way to incur IED damage oneself. Telling tales about war's horrors is as old as war itself; and war is horrible. More interesting is the role of "Scott Thomas" in the long redeployment of liberal pro-warriors to the more familiar turf of mere dismay. Their editorials will be enough to stop al-Qaeda. Won't they?

■ Conrad Black, who is both a baron and a press baron, was convicted recently of four felonies in Chicago. His friends, who include the founder of NATIONAL REVIEW and several of its editors and writers, notably Mark Steyn and John O'Sullivan, can point out that Black was acquitted on nine of the original fourteen charges, that the amount he and his fellow defendants are alleged to have stolen has been reduced from more than $500 million to less than $6.1 million, and that

INSIDE HARRY'S DORM

A heavy-lidded Hillary,
Eyeballs a tad bloodshot,
Having disdainfully declined
The comfort of a cot,
Reiterated, just before
The last mouse hit the sack,
That she's for dumping Iraq now
And never going back.

—W. H. VON DREELE

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It's the summer of 1944 and a weathered U.S. sergeant is walking in Rome only days after the Allied Liberation. There is a joyous mood in the streets and this tough soldier wants to remember this day. He's only weeks away from returning home. He finds an interesting timepiece in a store just off the Via Veneto and he decides to splurge a little on this memento. He loved the way it felt in his hand, and the complex movement inside the case intrigued him. He really liked the hunter's back that opened to a secret compartment. He thought that he could squeeze a picture of his wife and new daughter in the case back. He wrote home that now he could count the hours until he returned to the States. This watch went on to survive some harrowing flights in a B-24 bomber and somehow made it back to the U.S. Besides the Purple Heart and the Bronze Star, my father cherished this watch because it was a reminder of the best part of the war for any soldier—the homecoming.

He nicknamed the watch *Ritorno* for homecoming, and the rare heirloom is now valued at $42,000 according to *The Complete Guide to Watches*. But to our family, it is just a reminder that nothing is more beautiful than the smile of a healthy returning GI.

The hunter's back

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THE WEEK...

he is appealing the guilty verdicts and might still leave court an innocent man. The odds are against this, for technical rather than substantive reasons, but odds are always less than certainties. And there is little doubt that the case against Black proved to be vastly more flimsy than either the prosecution or most media forecasts suggested. Black's critics—who since the verdict seem to include half the world—say cynically that most of his remaining defenders are journalists who worked for him at one time or another. But so are some of the sadists who have been salivating all down his old publications' pages over the prospects of Black's being caged in some hard-time prison. We wish our friend well at the next legal stage.

■ A twentysomething Muslim woman who served as a juror in a London murder trial is being charged with contempt of court because she listened to music on an iPod, hidden beneath her head-covering *hijab*, while the trial was in progress. The judge in the case had thought he could hear tinny music in the courtroom, but dismissed the sound as a figment of his imagination until another juror sent him a note. What one wants to know, but none of the news stories has told us, is what kind of music the young lady was listening to: hip-hop, or Koranic chants? Neither would excuse her gross lack of social responsibility, but there would be some slight consolation in knowing that it was the Black Eyed Peas, not Osama bin Laden, who had seduced this young lady's affections away from Anglo-Saxon court procedure.

■ There are some curious nuggets of information to be unearthed from the Federal Election Commission's campaign-contribution database. Consider, for example, the filings for singer Barry Manilow. Back in February, he gave the maximum permitted contributions of $2,300 each to Democrats Clinton, Edwards, and Obama. In April, he ponied up another $2,300 to Joe Biden. Fair enough; we are getting a pretty clear picture of Barry's political inclinations. But what's this? Most recently, the FEC database shows yet another maximum contribution by him—to GOP hopeful Ron Paul. Which of Dr. Paul's positions was it that got Mr. Manilow's attention? Abolishing the IRS? Withdrawal from the U.N.? Denial of birthright citizenship? More likely something to do with the Iraq War, we suspect. (Paul is a withdraw-now guy.) Whatever the attraction, it is mutual. Asked by MSNBC's Tucker Carlson if he was a fan of Manilow's music, the candidate replied: "I really like it now." Not even so austere a constitutionalist as Dr. Paul is immune to that showbiz glamour, it seems.

■ The game of checkers has been completely solved. A computer program has been developed that will make the best possible response to any of the 500 billion billion possible board positions that might arise in the noble game. The program, called Chinook, is the fruit of 18 years' work by programmers at the University of Alberta, Canada, on hundreds of computers. Having decisively conquered checkers, perhaps these brainiacs will advance to more challenging games: chess, perhaps, or bridge, or Middle Eastern politics.

■ Our pleasant blue Earth has a sister planet, Venus, of approximately the same size and internal composition. Venus, however, is not pleasant at all. An atmosphere 93 times heavier than Earth's creates pressure at the planet's surface equivalent to that half a mile down in our oceans. Daytime surface temperatures run about 860°F, and it rains sulfuric acid. Al Gore warns that this fate awaits us unless the United States joins an international treaty to combat global warming. As with all pronouncements by our global-alarmist-in-chief, some significant science is blithely ignored here: the relative proportions of carbon dioxide in the atmospheres of the two planets, for instance (Venus—96.5 percent, Earth—0.04 percent), or their distances from the sun (Venus—67 million miles, Earth—93 million). To cook up an atmosphere like that of Venus requires conditions wildly different from those on Earth, not to mention several hundred million years of cooking. The Earth's atmosphere may indeed be entering a warming trend, but it won't be raining sulfuric acid here anytime soon.

■ Coming soon to Los Angeles: a new exhibit by NR's own Roman Genn. Starting in September, the James Gray Gallery in Santa Monica will play host to a series of Genn's oil portraits. Genn's illustrations have graced our covers and inner pages since 1994, and, happily for all involved, have caused quite a stir. His send-up of Al Gore and the Clintons as "The Manchurian Candidates" on our March 24, 1997, cover got us

KATHY HUTCHINS PHOTOGRAPHY

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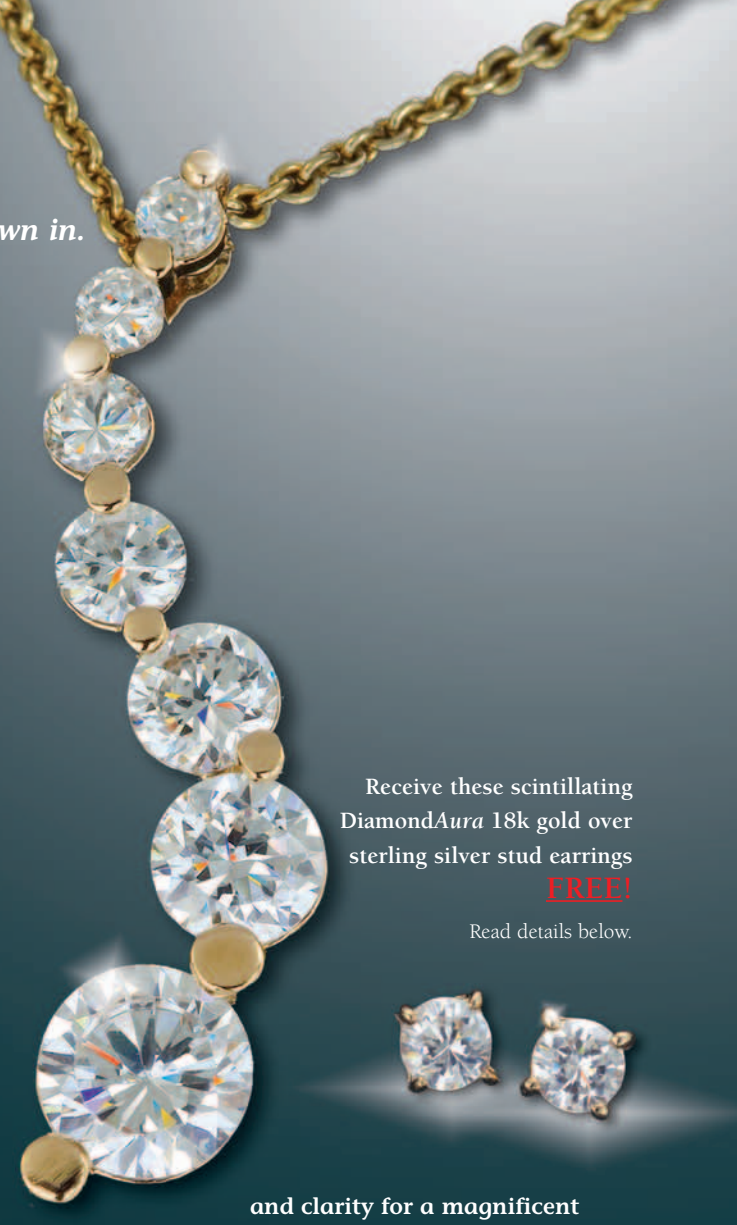

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picketed and earned him headlines. Genn honed his skills first in Moscow, where he was born, and where he was arrested repeatedly as a teenager for his art, which upset "proletarian sensibilities"—then as now. Go see his newest canvases, and some favored old ones, from September 8 through October 7.

PUBLIC POLICY

S-Chipping Away at Free Markets

TEN years ago, Congress enacted the State Children's Health Insurance Program, or S-CHIP, to cover kids whose parents were doing too well to qualify for Medicaid assistance but not well enough to buy their own insurance. Now the program is up for reauthorization, and congressional Democrats want to expand it as a down payment on national health care.

The program has already expanded beyond its original mission. New York is planning to cover families that make four times the federal poverty line. Almost 700,000 adults get their coverage through the program. The design of the program abets its growth: When states expand benefits, the federal government picks up most of the tab.

The program's expansion has come at the expense of private health-care coverage. The Congressional Budget Office estimates that the Democrats' proposal would get insurance to 2.3 million additional children but simply replace private insurance for another 1.7 million. (It does not report on how many adults would also lose their private coverage.) Liberals are untroubled by this prospect. The replacement effect "hardly matters as long as the net effect is an expansion of insurance," says *The New Republic*. But it means that taxpayers are not getting much bang for their bucks.

S-CHIP also creates a trap for low-wage workers. Michael Cannon of the Cato Institute notes that, in combination with other welfare programs, S-CHIP levies a very high effective marginal tax rate on many such workers. If they work hard to make more money, that is, the resulting loss of benefits can put them behind where they started.

Senate Democrats would finance the S-CHIP expansion by hiking cigarette taxes. These taxes fall most heavily on the poor; they cannot be hiked much further without stimulating black-market activity; and they will not raise the target amount of money unless a lot more people take up the newly expensive habit. (House Democrats would raise additional money by also kneecapping the private-sector component of Medicare.)

A lot of children are going without health insurance for the same reasons that a lot of adults are: Government policies have made health markets dysfunctional. Instead of giving up on those markets and having the federal government pick up the tab, we should fix those policies. We could start by taking two steps the Bush administration advocates. The first is to reform the tax code so that individuals who buy health insurance for themselves can get the same tax break that employer-provided health insurance gets. The second is to allow individuals to cross state lines, and thus jump over their own states' onerous mandates, to buy insurance.

Cannon, the Cato Institute health-care expert, makes a strong case for a third step: treating S-CHIP and Medicaid the way we treat welfare. In 1996, we reformed welfare by block-granting it to the states. Similarly, Congress should give a set amount of money to the states to cover needy families. It should not reward the states for being more generous.

The Democrats are in no mood to do any of these things. "Health insurance for kids" is a popular slogan, of course, and much of the business community is with the Democrats. Health-care providers are happy to get new subsidies, and some of them are afraid that Congress will ding them if they don't get on board.

If the Democrats agree to reform the tax treatment of health care in a free-market direction, it might be worth supporting a modest expansion of S-CHIP. Otherwise, President Bush should make good on his veto threat.

OBITUARY

Hugh C. Newton, R.I.P.

HUGH NEWTON's cheerful rubicundity was a fixture on the conservative scene for more than 40 years, whenever he could spare a little time from his mission: spreading the conservative word to the news media.

After serving in the Army in the Korean War, where he saw the face of Communism close up and did not like it, he went to work as a reporter for a small newspaper in Virginia, and then became a corporate speechwriter. But in 1964—Goldwater's year—he decided, as he put it, that "I wanted to work for something I believed in." He joined Reed Larson's National Right to Work Committee as its public-relations man, and before long news of the battle against forced union membership was spreading everywhere.

In 1973, Paul Weyrich, Joseph Coors, and Ed Feulner started a little organization called the Heritage Foundation, and it hired away Hugh and his buddy Herb Berkowitz to put it on the map. This they did with a PR style that was unusual among conservative organizations at the time. As Feulner puts it, "They knew how to work with the media, not fight it." In the phrase that became their trademark, "We can disagree without being disagreeable." Thanks to them, the Heritage Foundation's growing body of work didn't languish on dusty shelves, but fed op-ed pages and policy seminars across the country.

Still, what fellow conservatives will remember best is the conspiratorial tilt of the head as, glass in hand, Hugh took you aside to impart the latest news from church or state (and as a traditional Episcopalian, Hugh recently found news from the former no better than news from the latter).

And flights of angels sing him to his rest.

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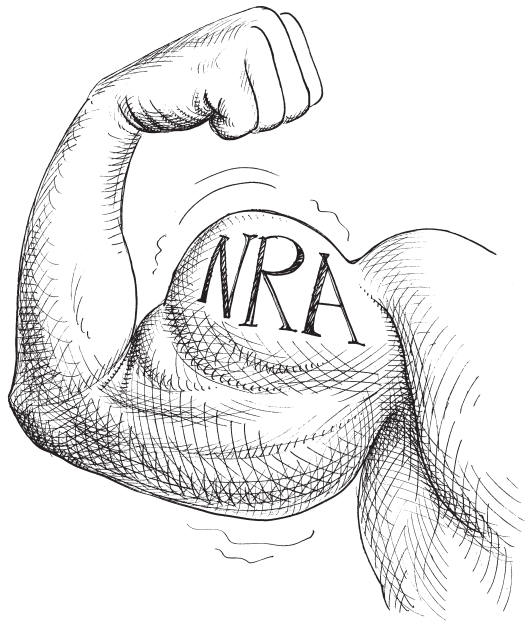

■ PUBLIC POLICY ■

NRA Nation

The Second Amendment people are winning

RAMESH PONNURU

In March, New York City mayor Michael Bloomberg issued a challenge to Nancy Pelosi. "The Democrats have said repeatedly that they blame the Republicans for no gun legislation," he said on his radio show. "Well, now they're in charge. Okay, stand up. And if not, I'm going to tell everybody."

Bloomberg, together with the Brady Center to Prevent Gun Violence and allied groups, wants Congress to repeal the "Tiahrt amendment." They say that the amendment keeps local law enforcement from having access to gun-trace data from the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, and Explosives (BATFE). Gun-rights groups say that they favor letting local law enforcement have that data when it is relevant to a specific investigation, but don't want mayors to be able to use the data in their litigation against gunmakers. Newspaper editorials have generally brushed past their arguments.

But Bloomberg, the media, and the gun-control groups have lost the fight. In July, the House appropriations committee voted 40–26 to keep the Tiahrt amendment—rejecting both a proposal to eliminate it and a compromise. Thirteen Democrats voted for the amendment. The Senate appropriations committee voted to keep it, too, with five Democratic senators on the winning side.

Bloomberg is wrong: The Democrats are not "in charge" of Congress, at least when it comes to guns—the National Rifle Association is.

A bill to repeal D.C.'s strict gun control has 210 co-sponsors in the House (a number that is still rising). That includes 57 Democrats. Tom Davis, a Virginia Republican who voted against the bill before, is now co-sponsoring it, too. Davis is preparing to run for the Senate, and his state is more culturally conservative than his district. But his switch also shows how political support for gun rights is growing.

You can see the evidence in state legislatures, too. Thirty-eight states issue concealed-carry permits to anyone who meets some minimal requirements; an additional two states let people carry them without having to get permits. In 2005, the NRA launched a project to change the law on self-defense. In 25 states, statutes or precedents imposed a duty to retreat on crime victims; if instead of fleeing they used guns to defend themselves, they could be held liable. The NRA wants them to have the legal option to defend themselves as soon as they are threatened. So far, 16 states have made the change.

Gun-control groups thought that the Virginia Tech massacre strengthened their case. But it did not improve their political fortunes at all. Congress is tightening up the law on background checks, but the bill is not the stuff of their dreams: The NRA actually supports it, and it is being co-sponsored by longtime NRA ally Rep. John Dingell. State legislatures have continued to move ahead with concealed-carry and self-defense bills.

What accounts for the extraordinary strength of the gun-rights movement? Four factors come to mind.

First: While the polls show that the public supports some gun-control measures, that support has slipped over the last decade. In 1999, after the Columbine massacre, ABC found that 67 percent of the public wanted "stricter gun control." Now 61 percent do. In 1999, the public was evenly split on whether people should be allowed to carry concealed handguns. Now they think it should be legal, by a 55 to 42 percent margin. Other polling organizations, and other questions, show similar results: The public has moved to the right. That movement may reflect the fact that concealed-carry laws have spread across the country without its becoming the O.K. Corral writ large.

Second: Support for gun control is a mile wide but half an inch deep. A lot of people who support particular gun-control measures—mandatory trigger locks, say—do so because those regulations sound reasonable to them. Many of them don't believe that such regulations will do much to reduce crime. It is not an issue that moves their votes.

Opponents of gun control, on the other hand, tend to be gun owners, for whom gun issues are much less abstract. The intensity is all on their side. Many of them will vote against a politician based on gun issues alone.

Third: Democrats are gun-shy after seeing this issue backfire on them too many times. Many Democrats, including Bill Clinton, blamed their loss of Congress in

ROMAN GENN

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1994 on their support for the "assault weapons" ban. Many Democrats blamed Al Gore's loss in 2000 on gun control, too, which contributed to his losing Arkansas, Tennessee, and West Virginia.

By 2006, the Democrats had backed off on guns. In some places, they ran pro-gun candidates. More often, they ran anti-gun candidates who campaigned on other issues. Guns were a major issue in only one competitive race last year: the contest to replace Henry Hyde, a moderate Republican on gun control, in the Sixth Congressional District of Illinois. Peter Roskam, a proponent of gun rights, beat back a strong Democratic challenge, partly by using the gun issue.

Fourth: The NRA is a highly effective organization. It has 4 million members—a little below its 2000 peak, but enough to be formidable. It keeps a wary eye on everything going on in Congress. And it understands that political muscle is built by being exercised.

The NRA worked that muscle twice in recent weeks. Rep. Jay Inslee, a Democrat from Washington State, proposed an amendment banning the importation of polar-bear trophies. The NRA opposed it as a regulation on hunting, and beat it in late June.

In mid-July, congressmen working with the NRA forced the Occupational Safety and Health Administration to withdraw a proposed regulation on explosives. The NRA feared the regulation was too broadly written, and would inadvertently make it hard for gun shops to store ammunition. OSHA is redrafting the rule.

Some other pro-gun organizations, notably the Gun Owners of America, criticize the NRA for insufficient devotion to Second Amendment principle. But such groups are nipping at its heels. They attacked the NRA for supporting the Dingell bill on background checks for the mentally ill, for example. But the bill nonetheless passed the House on a voice vote. The opposition, that is, did not even have the strength to force a roll-call vote. Nor have the anti-NRA groups played a significant role in any of the recent pro-gun victories.

Andrew Arulanandam, a spokesman for the NRA, allows that "we've had to work very hard" given the Democrats' new control of Congress. But the NRA has an ambitious agenda nonetheless. It wants Congress to pass a bill establishing that one state's concealed-carry licenses are valid in other states that have them. It wants to reform the BATFE. And it wants the Bush administration to rescind a regulatory agreement that the Clinton administration made with Smith & Wesson in its closing days. (The administration isn't enforcing that agreement, but the NRA worries that the next administration could.)

The biggest prize for the gun-rights movement could come next year: The Supreme Court may agree to take a case involving D.C.'s gun ban. Much recent scholarship, by liberals as well as conservatives and libertarians, argues that the Second Amendment protects an individual right to own guns. If the Court recognizes an individual right, even a qualified one, it will be a long-sought victory for gun rights.

How deeply the NRA will get involved in the presidential race is not clear. Of all the top-tier candidates, Fred Thompson has the most consistent pro-gun record. When he was mayor, Rudy Giuliani sued gunmakers and called for registering all gun owners. Since announcing his presidential run, however, he has said that his approach in New York City might not be right for all places, and he has urged courts to protect individuals' Second Amendment rights. Mitt Romney has done a more modest flip-flop. In the past he supported the ban on "assault weapons" and pointedly distanced himself from the NRA, but last year became a member of it.

The three leading Democratic candidates for president all get Fs from the NRA. But they seem to have learned from recent political history not to raise gun issues on the campaign trail.

The constituency for gun rights is changing. The movement's emphasis has shifted from hunting to self-defense, and is consequently becoming more female. The proportion of the population that owns guns is shrinking, which could weaken the NRA in the future. Guns remain far more regulated than they were before the assassination of Robert F. Kennedy (which led to the first modern gun control). Supporters of gun rights have been better at blocking new controls than repealing old ones.

At the moment, however, the NRA is probably the most successful element of the Right. Michael Bloomberg is going to be disappointed for a while to come. **NR**

■ THE NATION

Abortion And Crime

One has an effect on the other, but it may not be the effect you think

JOHN R. LOTT JR.

Violent crime in the United States shot up like a rocket after 1960. From 1960 to 1991, reported violent crime increased by an incredible 372 percent. This disturbing trend was seen across the country, with robbery peaking in 1991 and rape and aggravated assault following in 1992. But then something unexpected happened: Between 1991 and 2000, rates of violent crime and property crime fell sharply, dropping by 33 percent and 30 percent, respectively. Murder rates were stable up to 1991, but then plunged by a steep 44 percent.

Several plausible explanations have been advanced for the drop during the 1990s. Some stress law-enforcement measures, such as higher arrest and conviction rates, longer prison sentences, "broken windows" police strategies, and the death penalty. Others emphasize right-to-carry laws for concealed handguns, a strong economy, or the waning of the crack-cocaine epidemic.

Of all the explanations, perhaps the most controversial is the one that attributes lower crime rates in the '90s to *Roe* v. *Wade*, the Supreme Court's 1973 decision to mandate legalized abortion. According to this argument, the large number of women who began having abortions shortly after *Roe* were most likely unmarried, in their teens, or poor, and their children would have been "unwanted." Children born in these circumstances would have had a higher-than-average likelihood of

Mr. Lott is a senior research scientist at the University of Maryland. This piece is based on his new book, *Freedomnomics*, as well as his published academic research.

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becoming criminals, and would have entered their teens—their "criminal prime"—in the early 1990s. But because they were aborted, they were not around to make trouble.

This is an attention-grabbing theory, to be sure. But a thorough analysis of abortion and crime statistics leads to the opposite conclusion: that abortion increases crime.

Debate about the relationship between abortion and crime was greatly influenced by a Swedish study published in 1966 by Hans Forssman and Inga Thuwe. They followed the children of 188 women who were denied abortions from 1939 to 1941 at the only hospital in Gothenburg, Sweden. Their study compared these "unwanted" children with another group, this one composed of the first child born at the hospital after each of the "unwanted" children. They found that the "unwanted" children were much more likely to grow up in adverse conditions—for example, with divorced parents, or in foster homes. These children were also more likely to become delinquents and have trouble in school. Unfortunately, the authors never investigated whether the children's "unwantedness" caused their problems, or were simply correlated with them.

Forssman and Thuwe's claim, notwithstanding the limits of the data supporting it, became axiomatic among supporters of legalized abortion. During the 1960s and '70s, before *Roe*, abortion-rights advocates attributed all sorts of social ills, including crime and mental illness, to "unwanted" children. Weeding these poor, crime-prone people out of the population through abortion was presented as a way to make society safer.

Recently, John Donohue and Steven Levitt—a law professor and an economist, respectively—revived the debate. They presented evidence that supposedly demonstrated abortion's staggeringly large effect on crime rates, and argued that up to "one-half of the overall crime reduction" between 1991 and 1997, and up to 81 percent of the drop in murder rates during that period, was attributable to the rise in abortions in the early to mid 1970s. If that claim was accurate, they had surely found the Holy Grail of crime reduction.

Murder Rates by Age, Before and After *Roe* v. *Wade**
Murders per 100,000 People
30
25
20
15
10
5
0
Persons born in the four years prior to *Roe* v. *Wade*
Persons born in the four years after *Roe* v. *Wade*
10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22 23 24 25
Age

*DATA EXCLUDE STATES UNAFFECTED BY THE RULING.

Most people who challenge the "abortion reduces crime" argument do so on ethical grounds, rather than trying to rebut the empirical evidence. But it is worth looking at the data, too—because they do not prove what they are supposed to.

To understand why abortion might not cut crime, one should first consider how dramatically it changed sexual relationships. Once abortion became widely available, people engaged in much more premarital sex, and also took less care in using contraceptives. Abortion, after all, offered a backup if a woman got pregnant, making premarital sex, and the nonuse of contraception, less risky. In practice, however, many women found that they couldn't go through with an abortion, and out-of-wedlock births soared. Few of these children born out of wedlock were put up for adoption; most women who were unwilling to have abortions were also unwilling to give up their children. Abortion also eliminated the social pressure on men to marry women who got pregnant. All of these outcomes—more out-of-wedlock births, fewer adoptions than expected, and less pressure on men "to do the right thing"—led to a sharp increase in single-parent families.

Multiple studies document this change. From the early 1970s through the late 1980s, as abortion became more and more frequent, there was a tremendous increase in the rate of out-of-wedlock births, from an average of 5 percent (1965–69) to over 16 percent twenty years later (1985–89). Among blacks, the number jumped from 35 percent to 62 percent. While not all of this rise can be attributed to liberalized abortion laws, they were certainly a key contributor.

What happened to all these children raised by single women? No matter how much they want their children, single parents tend to devote less attention to them than married couples do. Single parents are less likely than married parents to read to their children or take them on excursions, and more likely to feel angry at their children or to feel that they are burdensome. Children raised out of wedlock have more social and developmental problems than children of married couples by almost any measure—from grades to school expulsion to disease. Unsurprisingly, children from unmarried families are also more likely to become criminals.

So the opposing lines of argument in the "abortion reduces crime" debate are clear: One side stresses that abortion eliminates "unwanted" children, the other that it increases out-of-wedlock births. The question is: Which consequence of abortion has the bigger impact on crime?

Unfortunately for those who argue that abortion reduces crime, Donohue and Levitt's research suffered from methodological flaws. As *The Economist* noted, "Donohue and Levitt did not run the test they thought they had." Work by two economists at the Boston Federal Reserve, Christopher Foote and Christopher Goetz,

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found that, when the test was run correctly, it indicated that abortion actually *increases* violent crime. John Whitley and I had written an earlier study that found a similar connection between abortion and murder—namely, that legalizing abortion raised the murder rate, on average, by about 7 percent.

The "abortion decreases crime" theory runs into even more problems when the population is analyzed by age group. Suppose that liberalizing abortion in the early 1970s can indeed explain up to 80 percent of the drop in murder during the 1990s, as Donohue and Levitt claim. Deregulating abortion would then reduce criminality first among age groups born after the abortion laws changed, when the "unwanted," crime-prone elements began to be weeded out. Yet when we look at the declining murder rate during the 1990s, we find that this is not the case at all. Instead, murder rates began falling first among an older generation—those over 26—born before *Roe*. It was only later that criminality among those born after *Roe* began to decline.

Legalizing abortion increased crime. Those born in the four years after *Roe* were much more likely to commit murder than those born in the four years prior. This was especially true when they were in their "criminal prime," as shown in the nearby chart.

The "abortion decreases crime" argument gets even weaker when we look at data from Canada. While crime rates in both the United States and Canada began declining at the same time, Canada liberalized its abortion laws much later than the U.S. did. Although Quebec effectively legalized abortion in late 1976, it wasn't until 1988, in a case originating in Ontario, that the Canadian supreme court struck down limits on abortion nationwide. If the legalization of abortion in the U.S. caused crime to begin dropping 18 years later, why did the crime rate begin falling just three years after the comparable legal change in Canada?

Even if abortion did lower crime by culling out "unwanted" children, this effect would be greatly outweighed by the rise in crime associated with the greater incidence of single-parent families that also follows from abortion liberalization. In short, more abortions have brought more crime. NR

■ DEFENSE

'Peace Through Light'

The latest case of missile defense and its enemies

JOHN J. MILLER

FRIDAY THE 13TH may not be the most auspicious date for a high-stakes missile-defense test, but it didn't bother Air Force Col. John Daniels. "We had no concerns," he says. Indeed, the plane that he and many others have spent years building worked just about perfectly on that star-crossed night in July. It took off from Edwards Air Force Base in California, tracked a flying target, and successfully aimed its weapon system. The plane didn't open fire, but it came closer than ever before to demonstrating the ability to shoot down an enemy missile with a laser.

The Airborne Laser program (ABL) is about two years away from attempting to perform that pioneering feat. If Daniels and his team succeed in destroying a mock warhead in 2009, ABL has the potential to become an indispensable part of U.S. missile-defense strategy. "We're on the verge of changing the fundamental physics of war," says Daniels.

Before that can happen, however, ABL must overcome its political opponents in Washington. Earlier this year, Democrats moved to slash hundreds of millions of dollars from the program. It's the type of budget battle that the Capitol hasn't seen since the Clinton years, when missile-defense hawks in a GOP-controlled Congress routinely clashed with an administration that didn't share their military priorities. The branches of government have changed but the conflict of visions remains the same. ABL's schedule might suffer a delay of two years, or worse. "The program could come to a screeching halt," warns Air Force Lt. Gen. Henry A. "Trey" Obering, who heads the Pentagon's Missile Defense Agency. "These proposed cuts threaten to cripple it."

ABL may be high-tech, but boys armed with magnifying glasses have long appreciated the lethal power of light, to the detriment of ant colonies everywhere. Some credit the Greek mathematician Archimedes with using mirrors to reflect sunlight and incinerate a Roman fleet more than 2,000 years ago. More recently, lasers have occupied the hyperactive minds of science-fiction writers and movie directors. When liberals lampooned Ronald Reagan's Strategic Defense Initiative as "Star Wars," they meant to imply that it was pure fantasy.

In reality, laser weapons began to assume practical shape in the early 1980s. An Air Force program even destroyed a few drones and missiles in flight. But its primitive laser was bulky, unreliable, and potentially hazardous—similar in its way to those old-fashioned cannons that occasionally blew up on their own artillery crews. The program was ended and the plane that carried this groundbreaking laser is now warehoused at the Air Force Museum near Dayton, Ohio.

Several years later, however, the Gulf War demonstrated the importance of missile defenses and highlighted the need for a weapon that could attack an enemy missile shortly after launch. By 1996, the Airborne Laser program was in full swing. Even then, it had skeptics. "When I went to work on the original proposal, I thought it would be a good way to kill a few months before a real job came along," says Don Clapp of Boeing, which coordinates the project with Lockheed Martin and Northrop Grumman. Today, Clapp is Boeing's chief engineer for ABL. "We've never hit a problem where we looked each other in the eye and said, 'We can't do this.'"

Although ABL represents newfangled technology, the outside of the plane looks almost like an ordinary 747. There are no passenger windows and it's coated in the dull gray paint that the Pentagon must purchase by the supertanker-load. The nose betrays the plane's extreme makeover: It's sheared off, and in its place is mounted a knobby turret that holds what appears to be a huge searchlight.

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can compensate for distortions. This prepares the way for the third laser—a high-energy, megawatt-class chemical oxygen-iodine laser. It concentrates a powerful beam on an enemy rocket's fuel casing. Total annihilation takes only a few seconds. The range of the laser is classified, though officials admit that the figure is "hundreds of kilometers."

All told, ABL is an incredibly robust defensive weapon. The launch of a traditional anti-ballistic interceptor—the type currently deployed in Alaska and California and that the Bush administration also would like to place in Poland—is an all-or-nothing proposition. It zeroes in on a single target. If it hits, the interceptor obliterates itself in the process. ABL, by contrast, can shoot at multiple targets. It's like a missile-defense base with wings.

The concept of ABL is to attack missiles in their boost phase—a short period immediately after takeoff, when they're larger and slower than they will be at any other point in their trajectories. And because ABL destroys missiles near their launch sites, it can provide missile-defense coverage to the whole planet, instead of the regional defense offered by other programs. Any fallout from the wreckage, moreover, would occur near the launch site, rather than close to a missile's target. ABL would defend against ICBMs as well as theater-range missiles such as Scuds and anti-satellite missiles of the variety that China tested earlier this year.

On June 21, ABL paid a brief visit to Andrews Air Force Base, just beyond Washington's beltway in Maryland. With budget cuts looming, the Pentagon wanted to show off the plane to members of Congress as well as the press. I went on an early-morning tour.

If ABL's exterior looks roughly like a 747, the interior is completely different. Designers have gutted it to make room for a cramped maze of computers, wires, and tubes. "It's like building a ship in a bottle," says Greg Hyslop, Boeing's program director. The laser is generated in the rear of the aircraft, amid six modules that function as batteries for the weapon, each one the size of a Chevy Suburban. The beam travels in tubes to the front of the plane, then through a massive mirror-filled device nicknamed "the wall of fire," and finally out the turret.

The challenge of making all the pieces work is daunting, and has led to higher price tags and longer timelines. In 1996, the Pentagon foresaw a program that would cost $2.5 billion and become operational in 2006. Today, ABL has cost more than $4 billion and is still undergoing tests. "This is a complex job," says Hyslop. "It's much more difficult than what people originally had thought." The hardware is state-of-the-art, the software contains millions of lines of code, and the plane's mirrors must be kept in such a pristine condition that they're more efficient than those used in telescopes that look at quasars on the edge of the universe. "You can count on your hands and toes the number of experts who truly understand what we're doing," says Obering.

The technical aspect of ABL is just about proven—all of the component parts appear to work. The plane has demonstrated the ability to do almost everything it needs to do short of firing the high-energy laser in the turbulent conditions of an actual flight. "At this point, we don't need a technological miracle," says Daniels. Success is no longer a matter of invention, but engineering.

If ABL proves its worthiness when the laser is tested in two years' time, then the prototype will become available for emergencies—when North Korea threatens to test a long-range missile over the Sea of Japan, for instance. The next step is to build a production model. The Pentagon currently hopes to stock seven ABLs in its arsenal. Fighter jets would defend them and refueling aircraft would keep them aloft. "In 24 hours, we can have the ABL anywhere in the world," says Air Force Capt. Tim O'Grady.

As long as it's finished, that is. In May, the House Armed Services Committee approved a spending plan that hacks $250 million from a request of $549 million for ABL. That's bad enough, but it's actually an improvement over the $400 million a subcommittee had recommended removing—a step that would all but eviscerate the program. In the Senate, a plan to wipe out $200 million is about to reach the floor and Christopher Dodd, a Democrat from Connecticut, plans to offer an amendment that would eliminate ABL's funding entirely.

On July 11, the top U.S. commander in South Korea urged Congress to reconsider. "We estimate that North Korea has around 800 [theater-range] missiles in their operational inventory," wrote Army Gen. B. B. Bell. "Intercepting these missiles during their boost phase while still over North Korean territory would be a huge combat multiplier for me."

During the Cold War, the doctrine of "peace through strength" animated U.S. foreign policy, especially under Reagan. When ABL was at Andrews AFB in June, Jason Brewster, a Boeing contractor, wore a green jumpsuit with a patch on the sleeve that suggested a slightly different approach: "peace through light." **NR**

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■ THE WORLD

Taiwan's Two Dozen

Who will dare have relations with Free China?

JAY NORDLINGER

And then there were 24—24 nations that have diplomatic ties with Taiwan. Before June, there were 25, but then Costa Rica defected to Communist China. That is, the government in San José transferred its recognition from Taiwan to the PRC.

But why, you ask, can't a government recognize both countries—both Taiwan and the PRC? That is a sweet, innocent question. The answer is: Because the PRC won't permit it. They demand that you recognize them, and only them—not Taiwan. And they often get their way through ugly tactics. Abroad as at home, the government in Beijing is a bully.

And Oscar Arias was less than a hero, when announcing that Costa Rica would ditch Taiwan. The Costa Rican president noted that the PRC is his nation's number-one trading partner. He also said, "China is the most successful emerging economy in the world, and soon it will be the second-strongest economy in the world, after the United States." Switching recognition from Taiwan to Beijing was merely "an act of elemental realism."

Anyone can understand that—every nation has to look after its interests. But Arias couldn't help knocking Taiwan, as the *International Business Times* explained in an article titled "Costa Rica criticizes Taiwan as stingy." Arias had said, "I was always critical of the Taiwanese, and I can say now that I always told them: If you want to have friends in the world, you should be more generous." In other words, Taiwan had lost out in a game of what's called "dollar diplomacy": It cannot compete in a bidding war, or a bribing war, with the PRC.

Taiwan's foreign minister, James Huang, said, "We tried our very best to maintain ties with Costa Rica, but eventually we failed. This is not something that a country which stands for peace and democracy should do—cut ties with its partner of 60 years." Huang offered to resign his position, a mark of how important this loss was to Taiwan. (Huang's offer was rejected.) When there are only 20-some countries that recognize you, each one means a lot.

So, whom does Taiwan have left, for diplomatic partners? A motley collection of small countries, in Latin America, the Caribbean, Africa, and the Pacific. I will call the roll: Belize, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, Panama, and Paraguay; the Dominican Republic, Haiti, St. Kitts and Nevis, St. Lucia, and St. Vincent and the Grenadines; Burkina Faso, Gambia, Malawi, São Tomé and Príncipe, and Swaziland; and Kiribati, the Marshall Islands, Nauru, Palau, the Solomon Islands, and Tuvalu. It's get-out-the-atlas time. Also, the Vatican recognizes Taiwan—for now. (All of these nations are "for now.")

After Costa Rica left Taiwan for Beijing, some observers thought that other Latin American countries would tumble, in a domino effect. The Taiwanese vice president made an urgent trip to the region, starting in the Dominican Republic (a nation both Latin American and Caribbean, to be sure). The outgoing PRC envoy to the country made a sniffy observation: He said that it was "just a matter of time" before the Dominican Republic switched to Beijing. But no one could confidently dispute it.

Making a rather beautiful statement, sometime earlier, was the president of El Salvador, Tony Saca. He said, "Taiwan is an independent country that has won its space, and we will be maintaining relations with Taiwan. If China accepts this, we will open relations with pleasure"—that is, open relations with the PRC, too. Which, of course, is a practical impossibility.

The fundamental problem is this: Taiwan regards itself as a country, and the PRC regards it as a renegade Chinese province. The more partners Taiwan has, the more obvious its sovereignty will seem; the fewer partners it has, the less legitimate it will seem. The PRC is bent on chipping away at Taiwan's list, and Taiwan is determined to see that list hold.

In the late 1960s, Taiwan had relations with almost 70 countries. But then, Taiwan was booted from the U.N., and the PRC was brought in. Taiwan lost a great many countries from its list. In 1979, the United States itself fell off the list—or rather, yanked itself off it.

But Taiwan, oddly enough, refused to die. That is, it refused to be swallowed up by the hulking, Communist mainland, afforded virtually all the international recognition. Taiwan became a democracy, putting the lie to the notion that "Asian values" exclude democracy. Taiwan also became very prosperous. Today, this nation of 23 million people is the 17th-largest economy in the world. It is 14th-largest in trade. It is practically unsurpassed in high technology. Yet it is not a winner in "dollar diplomacy."

Indeed, Taiwan had an easier time of it when it was undemocratic—when it did not have a proper legislature, financial transparency, and everything else that goes with democracy. The island's rulers could simply sprinkle money as they liked. And, of course, Beijing has no democratic encumbrances. A question: Beijing built both the presidential and the parliamentary buildings in Cape Verde. Would Taiwanese democrats—legislators and taxpayers—have gone for that?

And yet those 24 countries remain on Taiwan's list. Why? There are a number of reasons, some general, some individual. Prof. Arthur Waldron of the University of Pennsylvania points out that, if you're on Taiwan's list, you may get special attention: The list is so small. Frank Ching, an experienced journalist in Hong Kong, makes a related point: If you're a tiny country, with no global profile, you may not need relations with the PRC. You can indulge in a more idiosyncratic relationship.

Also, the Taiwan/Beijing question figures in the domestic politics of some countries. Several of them have switched their recognition back and forth, depending on who has held power. Take little (and lovely) St. Lucia. In 1984, Prime Minister John Compton established relations with Taiwan. When he left office in 1996, his successor went with Beijing. On resuming power last year, Sir John reopened relations with Taiwan (thus losing the PRC).

And Beijing reacted with fury. The foreign ministry declared that St. Lucia had committed a "flagrant violation," and was guilty of "interference in the internal affairs of China." It demanded that St. Lucia "immediately correct the wrongful decision of resuming so-called 'diplomatic relations' with the Taiwan regime."

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Even St. Lucia (pop. 169,000) can pique the great red dragon.

On at least one occasion, the ping-ponging in the Caribbean had a funny result. Grenada once recognized Taiwan, but was handsomely bought off in 2005. Came time to open a new sports stadium, built by the PRC—and the Royal Grenada Police Band struck up the wrong anthem. They played the Taiwanese anthem. Apparently, the bandmaster had forgotten to update his repertoire—and the visiting PRC sugar daddies were none too amused.

Enough levity, however. Earlier, I was mentioning something about Chinese tactics and their ugliness. As Frank Ching has noted, the PRC seldom uses its veto in the U.N. Security Council—and when it does, it may well be for the purpose of shaking Taiwan's partners. In 1999, China blocked the continuation of a peacekeeping operation in Macedonia, a country with a volatile mix of ethnicities. In due course, Macedonia dropped Taiwan and set up with Beijing. China acted similarly in the cases of Haiti and Guatemala, both of which needed peacekeepers.

One of the most egregious cases is that of Chad. Until last summer, Chad recognized Taiwan—and the PRC aided rebels trying to overthrow the Chadian government. Obviously, this put terrible pressure on the government. Hours before the Taiwanese president was to fly to Chad for a presidential inauguration, word leaked that Chad was aligning with Beijing. A ceremony was held in the Chinese capital that night. A communiqué from that ceremony read, "Taiwan is an inalienable part of Chinese territory." James Huang, the Taiwanese foreign minister, told the press that Chad's president had "indicated over and over again that China is supporting the rebels to try to topple the government. He even mentioned that China is our common enemy."

We think of the ancient wisdom, or expression of resignation: If you can't beat 'em, join 'em.

Taiwan, as Professor Waldron says, is "the most isolated state in the world." It is excluded from international councils, and can sometimes seem a pariah nation. The list of indignities visited upon it is long—a lot longer than that list of diplomatic partners. For example, Taiwan's democratically elected president can barely fly around the world, because many free and democratic nations refuse to allow his plane to refuel. The PRC—a one-party dictatorship—would object.

We might ask whether Taiwan needs diplomatic partners. What if the list of 24 dwindled to zero? Frank Ching points out that Taiwan is unlikely to pick up new partners, given China's rise. James Mann, another superb China-watcher, says, "I don't think Taiwan should make such a point of it"—of having partners. What really counts is Taiwan's unofficial relations with major countries, especially the United States. And that is surely true.

But a Taiwan without sovereign states that recognize it is a Taiwan that may have profound difficulty being recognized as a sovereign state itself. Under these circumstances, the PRC could find it all the easier to seize Taiwan, at last incorporating a defiant Chinese rump on an experimental island that proved friendless.

When Costa Rica was taking its leave of Taiwan, after a 60-year relationship, the PRC's foreign minister said that other Latin American countries should follow suit—should "follow the tide of history and make the correct choice." It could be that Communist China is, indeed, the tide of history, and that abandoning Taiwan for it is the correct choice. But, if so, the tide of history's an ass. And so is the correct choice. **NR**

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■ AFRICA

Mugabe's Marvelous Foe

Meet Zimbabwean archbishop Pius Ncube

TRAVIS KAVULLA

Archbishop Pius Ncube, Zimbabwe's senior Catholic cleric, has told his country's sad recent history so many times that his description has become methodical. In the past decade, he recounts, "the GDP has shrunk by 40 percent. Farmers have left the country. Inflation has been phenomenal, around 9,000 percent now. Joblessness is over 80 percent. The government makes only cosmetic changes, like striking off zeros from the dollar—last year, they chopped off three."

Rarely has a country lost so much, so quickly. Once relatively prosperous, Zimbabwe today holds two unenviable world records. The first is its inflation rate: Prices more than double with each passing week. The resulting scarcity, together with a high prevalence of HIV/AIDS, has accorded Zimbabwe its other record: the world's lowest life expectancy. A female born today can expect an average lifetime of 34 years; a male, 37 years.

"If you came to Bulawayo tomorrow I could bring you to cemeteries that are overflowing," says David Coltart, an opposition member of parliament who represents Bulawayo, Zimbabwe's second city and the seat of Ncube's archdiocese. "I imagine they look like the battlefields of the Somme must have looked like—miles and miles of earth, freshly dug and freshly filled in."

In recent months, as the economy went into freefall and the crisis grew, Mugabe's regime became only more paranoid and prone to violence. Archbishop Ncube is one of the few Zimbabweans whose high profiles allow them to speak somewhat freely. In recent months, he has grown increasingly strident, calling for a popular uprising, and telling the *Times* of London that, in light of the "massive risk to life" within the country, a British invasion would be justified. "Zimbabweans need a bit of courage," he says. "There is so much fear. People are afraid of the cruelty of the state. People are afraid that if they go on the streets in protest they will be beaten and jailed, or even killed. Villagers in rural areas are afraid that they will be denied access to food if they speak out. . . . The Church needs to show by example that freedom is worth risking death for."

An early critic of the Mugabe regime, the archbishop has a long history of putting himself in danger. In 1983, Ncube was a parish priest at the epicenter of Gukurahundi, the fanciful name (it means "the rain which washes away the chaff") given to the ethnic slaughter of 20,000 of Zimbabwe's minority Ndebele people, carried out by a North Korea–trained brigade that answered directly to Mugabe. Coltart credits the young priest with "bringing in the news and writing reports when most of the church, Catholic and Protestant, was mute and petrified."

Archbishop Pius Ncube

In the intervening years, neither Mugabe nor Ncube has much changed. Mugabe remains driven by his will to hold unchallenged power, saying recently of his political opponents, "The police have the right to bash them." The police did just that on March 11, beating and jailing dozens at a prayer gathering called by the parliamentary opposition. Later in the day, the ruling party's youth brigade stormed a hospital where some of the wounded were being treated and brought them at gunpoint to police stations to be tortured.

The crackdown in March sent a loud warning that most Zimbabweans quietly heeded. But the Catholic Bishops' Conference broke the silence the next month, issuing a pastoral letter on Easter weekend to be read at Mass and posted in all churches. Citing John Paul II's injunction to "give a name to the root of the evils which afflict us," the bishops' letter frankly diagnosed Zimbabwe's political situation and pointed a finger at the government. Each parish was directed to hold a "Prayer Service for Zimbabwe" every Friday, indefinitely. Much of the pastoral letter was clearly the handiwork of Ncube, who has loudly blamed Zimbabwe's crisis on Mugabe's "egocentricity and megalomania."

Visibly enraged that the Church had not toed the line others had, Mugabe appeared soon afterwards on state television, declaring, "This is an area we warn them not to tread." In the months since, the state press has upped its propaganda offensive against Ncube, labeling him "arrogant" and "a puppet" of Western powers, and accusing him of various far-fetched misdeeds, from rape to distributing homosexual pornography. Catholic clergymen have taken a place among the foremost targets of the Central Intelligence Organization (CIO), Zimbabwe's formidable spy agency.

Mugabe is nothing if not a cunning politician, and, throughout his rule, he has intimidated and co-opted not just politicians and industrialists, but many clergymen as well. A report compiled by Ncube, Coltart, and others that detailed the 1983 atrocities was withheld from publication by a Church hierarchy wary of publicly challenging Mugabe. And for years, Archbishop Patrick Chakaipa of Harare, Zimbabwe's capital, remained silent in the face of the regime's depredations,

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Supreme Court Justice Questions Marijuana Policy

Justice John Paul Stevens

Dissenting from the recent Supreme Court ruling on the suspension of an Alaskan student for waving a banner – "BONG HITS 4 JESUS" – at a high school event, Justice Stevens takes the long view:

> "….the current dominant opinion supporting the war on drugs in general, and our anti-marijuana laws in particular, is reminiscent of the opinion that supported the nationwide ban on alcohol consumption when I was a student. While alcoholic beverages are now regarded as ordinary articles of commerce, their use was then condemned with the same moral fervor that now supports the war on drugs…
>
> "…just as Prohibition in the 1920's and early 1930's was secretly questioned by thousands of otherwise law-abiding patrons of bootleggers and speak-easies, today the actions of literally millions of otherwise law-abiding users of marijuana, and of the majority of voters in each of the several States that tolerate medicinal uses of the product, lead me to wonder whether the fear of disapproval by those in the majority is silencing opponents of the war on drugs."

"Stevens compared the current marijuana ban to the abandoned alcohol ban and urged a respectful hearing for those who suggest 'however inarticulately' that the ban is 'futile' and that marijuana should be legalized, taxed and regulated instead of prohibited."
– Washington Post, July 26, 2007

70% of the drug war is about marijuana.

Common Sense for Drug Policy
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allowing Mugabe to claim (at Chakaipa's funeral Mass, no less) that Ncube had committed a "satanic" betrayal, "siding with the enemy . . . the farmers and the British."

Today, the Vatican seems to have endorsed Ncube's approach, and has filled vacant bishoprics with clerics critical of the regime. But other high-ranking religious figures owe their livelihood to Mugabe. A textbook example is Nolbert Kunonga. After teaching "African Christianity" at a New York seminary owned by the Rev. Sun Myung Moon, Kunonga returned to Zimbabwe as chaplain of Africa University, the country's first private college.

"Because he was a man of the cloth, the university wasn't thinking he could be a state informer," says Liberty Mupakati, a former CIO agent who worked with the chaplain and now lives in England. In this role Kunonga excelled, dutifully informing on students and faculty. When the Anglican bishopric of Harare became vacant, the regime was determined to emplace its own man in the pulpit. Amidst a torrent of bribes, Kunonga was elected. In his years as bishop, he has been a reliable mouthpiece, firing dissenting clergy, speaking of the need to "baptize children the Zanu-PF [the ruling party] way," and loudly promoting the government's policy of land seizure. Kunonga himself has received a large farm for his troubles. But he has also become a gaudy emblem of the Zimbabwean elite's excesses, calling off Sunday services on one occasion and telling priests to bring their flocks (and tithings) to his 33rd wedding anniversary instead.

This "worship of power" is something Ncube sees everywhere in Zimbabwe's ruling circles, and he has attempted to combat it by example. Coltart describes him as "a simple person. He doesn't have any airs. Though he's an archbishop, you rarely see him in his role. He often drives himself around in a battered old car."

The archbishop's humble demeanor and decades-long reputation as an uncompromising voice for human rights make him the regime's "most problematic critic," Coltart says. "His comments are not viewed as partisan, and he's been extremely difficult to attack. . . . [The government has] been pretty desperate to do something about it, because his comments have been incredibly damaging, in Africa in particular."

Hours after I spoke to the archbishop by phone, the deputy sheriff of Bulawayo arrived at St. Mary's Cathedral to serve Ncube with a summons. In tow was a gaggle of media personnel from the state-controlled (and only) television channel, as well as the two state-controlled (and only) national newspapers. The next day's banner headline read: "Pius Ncube Shamed." Photographs were printed—nine in all, the most damaging showing the fuzzy image of a man claimed to be Ncube with a woman in various states of undress. The stories claimed that the photographs were taken by a hidden camera installed in the archbishop's bedroom.

Evidence-tampering and politically motivated prosecutions are hardly novelties in Zimbabwe. In 2004, Morgan Tsvangirai, the opposition leader, was found not guilty on treason charges after a judge found that the central piece of evidence, a video recording made by CIO agents in Montreal, had been doctored.

Still, it is hard to tell what impact the allegations, if proven or perceived to be true, will have. Some are not optimistic. Mupakati, the former CIO agent, says, "He's a church leader, and his credibility exists on moral grounds. I think he's more or less finished." The hopeful argue the government's tactics will be seen as desperate and hypocritical. Robert Mugabe, after all, fathered two children with his secretary Grace, a married woman 35 years his junior, while his first wife was succumbing to cancer. Coltart says the cleric enjoys an "enormous well of support," and points to a parishioner, interviewed by Voice of America, who noted that Ncube "has never condemned human frailty, but he has always condemned evil."

On the day the scandal breaks, Ncube sounds exhausted. "It is impossible to vote out Mugabe," he replies when asked about the elections scheduled for next year. He says many Zimbabweans are simply too physically weak to resist the government, and acknowledges that his hopes for foreign intervention amount to wishful thinking. Asked to predict how Zimbabwe's crisis will end, the archbishop sighs. "I don't know. I just don't know." **NR**

■ THE NATION II

Put 'Em to The Test

For a nation of minimally informed voters

JONAH GOLDBERG

Last summer, Mark Osterloh of Tucson, Ariz., was the Paris Hilton of the civics newsbeat, receiving lavish coverage for his cockamamie scheme to bribe Americans into voting. The eccentric activist wanted to make Arizona ballots double as lottery tickets, essentially enrolling every voter in a million-dollar drawing.

The Founding Fathers, spinning in their graves, must have paused in their dervish-like contortions to appreciate the almost magisterial stupidity of this idea. Still, Osterloh's scheme reflected the basic assumptions driving the national panic over low voter turnout: Healthy societies have lots of voters, unhealthy ones don't, our public policies are flawed because not enough people vote, and if everyone did vote our problems would be solved.

Of course, the conventional wisdom among left-leaning scholars and most journalists is that, if everyone voted, it'd be a huge boon for the Democrats. Arend Lijphart, a former head of the American Political Science Association, argues for mandatory voting on the assumption that America's social policies would be vastly improved if poor, uneducated, and otherwise disengaged citizens had more power over government priorities. This is the real agenda of the get-out-the-vote industry. Rock the Vote and its various sister organizations are simply dishonest when they say they want people to vote. What they really want is for people to vote for a prepackaged "youth" ideology that includes the usual wish-list of liberal policies, from environmental protection to education subsidies to affirmative action.

In fact, it's far from clear that maximum turnout would help the Democrats. "Simply put," political scientists Benjamin Highton and Raymond Wolfinger wrote in

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2001, "[American] voters' preferences differ minimally from those of all citizens; outcomes would not change if everyone voted." Ten years earlier, Stuart Rothenberg had issued his study "What If Nonvoters Voted?" He concluded, "There is no compelling evidence that nonvoters are so distinct from voters that they constitute a bloc ready to alter the fundamental balance of power in this country." The key difference between voters and nonvoters isn't race, age, class, or gender, but laziness. People who've recently moved, for example, vote less than others because they haven't gotten around to registering. If you disproportionately activate liberal nonvoters, they'll probably break Democratic, while conservative nonvoters will probably break Republican.

Left-wingers think this analysis misses an important point—that if a politician aimed his campaign at nonvoters, he would try to activate them with decidedly populist issues. There's some evidence to back this up. Studies show that, if everyone voted, candidates such as Ralph Nader and Ross Perot would do somewhat better. Lijphart argues that opinion polls showing few differences between voters and nonvoters miss the fact that nonvoters "have not given these questions much thought," haven't been "mobilized," and lack "class consciousness." Translation: If you can get the poor and uneducated all riled up, they'll demand a bigger slice of the pie, and America will be a better place.

But what if Osterloh, Lijphart, et al. are wrong? Wrong about what? you ask. About everything. Ever since the Progressive era, America has been working on the assumption that if you have just a little more democracy, a little broader franchise, then—ta-dah!—everything will be fixed. Bryan Caplan, in his spellbinding new book *The Myth of the Rational Voter*, calls this sort of thinking "democratic fundamentalism." Consider the hoary cliché, attributed to Al Smith in 1928, that "all the ills of democracy can be cured by more democracy." As Caplan notes, this means that no evidence can ever, under any circumstances, be held against democracy. "A person who said, 'All the ills of the markets can be cured by more markets,'" writes Caplan, "would be lampooned as the worst sort of market fundamentalist. Why the double standard?"

This may be a hint about what America really needs. If more voters isn't the answer, how about fewer? Left-wing mythology has led liberals to push for an ever-expanding franchise. Even now, there's a movement afoot to lower the voting age to 16, on the assumption that social policies will be much improved under the influence of people who think MTV's *Pimp My Ride* is the bomb. But in a rational society, it would go without saying that young people are less wise, less informed, and less qualified to make important decisions.

Take that insight a step further. Obviously, the policy of not letting very young people vote is arbitrary, and is unfair to the few hypereducated and precociously wise teenagers out there. Well, what about grown-ups caught on the other side of that line? There are millions of adults just as unqualified to vote as your typical teenager. The wisdom of the masses is depressing indeed. Numerous polls have found a majority of Americans unable to name a single branch of government. And in 1987, 45 percent of adult respondents to one survey thought that Karl Marx's dictum "From each according to his ability, to each according to his needs" could be found in the U.S. Constitution. No wonder liberals think there's a gusher of votes out there for them.

Now, the instinct of the engaged and informed political junkie (i.e., the type of person most likely to be reading this article) is to say, "O my stars and garters! There are a lot of morons out there!" But in truth Americans are very smart about the things they care about, and ignorant about the things they don't. So why should those who don't care about voting be harangued to vote? I don't get to vote on who should make it into the Rose Bowl, so why are we so desperate to get the input of people who know less about government than I do about football?

Poll taxes and property requirements would discriminate against the poor. But what would be so awful about a simple test of civic knowledge? Choosing the questions would be contentious, but the debate would itself be wonderfully educational. For starters, I'd suggest the test questions immigrants must answer in order to become U.S. citizens. They are so very vanilla—How many branches of government are there? What are the branches of government?—and yet they'd set a pretty high bar for many, if not most, Americans.

More important, making it harder to vote would cause Americans to take voting more seriously. It would point the arrow of civic engagement up instead of down. You could make an analogy with marriage. Marriage is a sign of social health—but not Anna Nicole Smith's gold-digging marriage to an 80-something bajillionaire 63 years her senior. Similarly, luring ignorant people—oops, sorry, "formerly disengaged and newly mobilized Americans"—into the voting booths with Powerball tickets is not a sign of civic health.

A voting test would send the signal that it's a valued accomplishment to be an informed citizen. It would allow politicians to aim their appeals ever so slightly higher than the dumbed-down, Rock the Vote gutter. Would such a reform make conservative policies more likely? I don't know, and that's really not my chief concern. But I predict that shrieking and screaming from the Left would reveal which side thinks its success depends on voter ignorance. **NR**

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Health of the State

Doctors, patients, and Michael Moore

THEODORE DALRYMPLE

According to *Sicko*, Michael Moore's current film about health care in America, the British and French live in a world of "we," while Americans live in a world of "me." This is reflected in their respective health-care systems: The British and French sunbathe in the cloudless uplands of universal state-funded health care, where everything is free, at least to the consumer if not to the taxpayer, while Americans struggle horribly in a muddy swamp to pay exorbitant costs for themselves, and even then have often simply to die for lack of funds.

One does not, of course, expect films made for specific propaganda purposes, such as *The Battleship Potemkin* or *Triumph of the Will*, to present human dilemmas in a subtle or complex fashion; furthermore, no one can pretend that a comparison of health-care systems is an easy, obvious, or exciting subject for filmmakers. A book on the subject would put most normal people to sleep quicker than a sleeping pill, however concerned about their health they might be. I therefore understand Mr. Moore's need to simplify by means of a dialectic between heartrending and uplifting human stories.

Nevertheless, and even allowing for his need to avoid ambiguities that would bore the pants off an average audience, his portrayal of Britain's National Health Service, in which I have worked for 20 years as a doctor at intervals over more than a third of a century, irritated me profoundly. In effect, only someone intent on telling a lie could have presented the situation as he presented it—for even the most fervent ideological supporters of the National Health Service would admit that, as it currently exists, it is not exactly problem-free (to put it mildly). To avoid public criticism of the NHS in Britain is like avoiding evidence of dictatorship in North Korea: It is possible only for the willfully blinkered.

Can anything be said in favor of a system like the National Health Service? Since Bernard Shaw, at least, it has been suspected that if doctors had a financial interest in providing treatment they would provide it regardless of whether or not it was medically necessary. A famous cartoon in *Punch*, some decades before the inauguration of the NHS, showed a tall and elegant surgeon standing before the mantelpiece of his London club.

"What did you operate on Jones for?" asks another member of the club.

"A hundred pounds," replies the surgeon.

"No," says the club-member, "I mean what had he got?"

"A hundred pounds," replies the surgeon.

This, it should be remembered, was not mere satire, for it was not long after the days of the famous surgeon Arbuthnot Lane, who took out the colons of the rich on the pretext of preventing autointoxication by their bowel contents.

The NHS ended that kind of thing, very largely if not entirely. (Private practice was still allowed after the hospitals and profession were nationalized in 1948, and middle-class children of my generation nearly all had their tonsils removed, with the effect, if not the conscious intention, of boosting the incomes of ear, nose, and throat surgeons.) Whether the NHS extended the best treatment to the poorest section of the population is another matter entirely.

LIVING OFF CAPITAL

In its most successful period, the state-run NHS was possibly the least bureaucratic health-care system in the world: far, far less bureaucratic than the American free-enterprise, or increasingly corporatist, system. This was because the doctors were still the most powerful group within it. The few managers in the system were their handmaidens, not their masters. In return for their salary, the doctors had effective control of most things, including who got what. They neither knew nor were interested in what anything cost: Rationing was informal and implicit rather than formal and explicit as it is now, and quite without bureaucratic control or costs.

The NHS also had the cultural capital of the hospital system that existed before it. It took over hundreds of voluntary hospitals that had been funded by local benefactors and charitable collections, and that were the pride of their area. It takes a long time to vitiate institutional pride, especially when the government is intelligent enough (as were successive governments, both Labour and Conservative) not to attack it directly.

But there were problems from the first. Chief among them was that capital expenditure came to an immediate halt after the NHS

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was begun. Fewer hospitals were opened in the first half-century after the start of the NHS than in the 1930s alone—that is to say, during the Great Depression. Thus the NHS was initially a relative success because it was, in effect, living off capital. The result has been that the vast majority of NHS hospitals are now run-down institutions, depressingly hideous and jerry-built; the one in which I worked was a 19th-century workhouse. Only someone intent on telling a lie could have missed this characteristic of the NHS.

The NHS was founded on the supposition that, as the population grew healthier thanks to its socialized ministrations, health-care costs would decline. The exact opposite was the case, of course: Not only did health care become vastly more expensive, but the population aged fast and needed ever more such health care. Government funding from general taxation always limped behind what was necessary to keep up with demand and with technological developments. Waiting lists for expensive investigations and procedures lengthened as shortages became ever greater. Emergency care remained good, but at the expense of almost everything else.

On coming into power, Margaret Thatcher realized that things could not continue as they were and that reform was necessary. Inadvertently, however, she made everything much worse in the long run. Instead of root-and-branch reform, she adopted a compromise. Her government acted as if it had a mistrust of professions, believing with Bernard Shaw that they were nothing but conspiracies against the laity, and that the inefficiencies of the service were caused by the restrictive practices of nurses and doctors. Accordingly, the answer to the problems of the state-run service was to introduce the methods of commercial business into them, but without the profit motive to discipline them.

NIGHTMARES OF BUREAUCRACY

The result has been a bizarre amalgam of the business ethics of Enron with the organizational principles laid down by Gogol. Bureaucracy has run riot in the NHS, to the extent that senior doctors now spend less than half of their time actually practicing medicine—which, in turn, creates the need for more doctors.

And the more administrators there are, the more administration doctors have to do. A senior physician at my hospital, who retired a couple of years ago, summed it up by saying that when he arrived in the hospital it had 1,800 beds and 3 administrators, but now it had 3 beds and 1,800 administrators. A slight exaggeration, of course, or perhaps a prediction.

It is hardly surprising that the system is capable of absorbing huge sums of money without producing much in the way of discernible benefit for patients. Expenditure has increased by 300 percent in ten years, but most people believe that very little, if anything, has changed for the better, and some things for the worse. The cash has largely disappeared into the pockets of those who work in the system, as a bribe to buy off their disaffection, and into the hands of managers, for whom increased bureaucracy has been hugely profitable, and their management-consultant cronies. (Developing Mrs. Thatcher's legacy in a creative fashion, Tony Blair's government has spent scores of billions of dollars on management consultants and information-technology systems that do not work. Contrary to Moore's insinuation in his film, a state-run system is at least as susceptible to corruption as one run for profit.)

He who pays the piper calls the tune, at least eventually. For many years the government refrained from interfering very obviously in the running of the health service in Britain, but it has increasingly set targets for hospitals and doctors to meet, and interfered with the minutiae of medical practice, laying down who must be treated first, and with what treatment—just as Ronald Reagan, who made a recording in 1961 on behalf of the AMA, said it would once a command system of health care had been set up. Moore, who plays the recording in the film, obviously thinks that Reagan's predictions must strike the viewer as ridiculous, simply because they are his, Reagan's; but in fact Reagan was quite right.

Indeed, Moore—without realizing it—presents evidence that Reagan was quite right. The one completely happy and satisfied doctor in Britain—whom Moore has remarkably been able to find—tells us in the film that he is paid more by the government if he reduces the percentage of smokers among his patients. Now of course smoking is very bad for you, and it is perfectly legitimate for doctors to advise their patients to quit—indeed it is part of their duty to do so—but for the government to provide doctors with an incentive to cajole and bully their patients into doing so is another matter altogether. It changes the whole basis of the relationship between doctor and patient; the doctor becomes in effect a conveyor of government orders. Orders can be benign or malign, but the habit of obeying them can become ingrained.

Managers in the NHS now often decide on the priority of patients' operations, not on clinical grounds, but according to government targets; they scour the wards for patients they believe can be discharged; they set priorities in the emergency rooms, again not according to clinical criteria, but according to the need to meet government targets. Managers now screen all referrals to psychiatrists, and decide which patients the psychiatrists should see, which is a fundamental breach of medical ethics. A central organization, the National Institute for Clinical Excellence, lays down what drugs may be prescribed by doctors in the NHS. Reagan was not fantasizing; he was describing the logic of the situation, a logic that should be obvious to anyone of average intelligence.

Now of course problems such as the ones I have just mentioned exist in all systems where payment for medical services is made by third parties. But to make a single, all-powerful third party—and the government at that—responsible for all such payment is to magnify and compound the problems.

PORTRAIT OF FAILURE

Sicko artfully implies that in a system such as the British NHS your social class or income makes no difference to the treatment you receive under it. The old aristocratic leftist, Anthony Benn, is wheeled out to declare this. But in fact nothing could be farther from the truth. Variation in morbidity and mortality between the social classes in Britain is as great as it was before the NHS was instituted, and possibly greater. This is because the middle classes are better housed, better fed, better educated, and therefore better able to take advantage of the service than those who are at the bottom of the social scale, who may safely be disregarded because they can neither write nor speak coherently. The NHS has done nothing to further equality.

Moore does not tell us this, nor does he tell us about waiting times in the NHS. (I remember one patient, a man of 70, who had had a hernia diagnosed seven years previously. He was put on the waiting list for an operation, but hearing nothing from the hospital

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for seven years wrote a letter to enquire when he would have his operation. He received a letter telling him to wait his turn. In a system such as the NHS, an apparently rational and just reason not to operate on him—i.e., there was something more urgent to be done—can always be found.)

He also fails to tell us there has been a rising tide of public dissatisfaction with the NHS; that 75 percent of senior doctors in Britain want to retire as soon as possible; that at least 50 percent of general practitioners have been threatened or assaulted by frustrated or angry patients; that ways of measuring waiting lists have been so corrupted by government manipulation that no one can say for sure whether they are increasing, decreasing, or staying the same; that more and more patients are seeking treatment abroad—even in India—rather than wait; that results in the NHS for many cancers and heart conditions are among the worst in the Western world; that the hospitals are filthy and that rates of hospital infection are also among the highest.

This is not to say that no good work is done in the NHS, or that everyone is badly treated. I myself have received nothing but excellent treatment under it. When a friend of mine collapsed and nearly died with an allergy in my house, the ambulance arrived within four minutes; she was resuscitated and taken to a hospital, where she received treatment that no amount of money could have improved upon.

On the other hand, when my mother, at the age of 82, had a serious and distressing skin condition that disfigured her, she was told there was an 18-month waiting list to see the dermatologist, and the pent-up demand was so great that even to see a dermatologist privately, paying the entire fee directly out of her own pocket, would take nine months. Horror stories of neglect and even cruelty, especially to those over 75, are commonplace. I remember visiting my 92-year-old uncle in the Royal Free Hospital—an august institution—where there was one nurse on duty for 20 aged patients, and she was an Australian bird of passage working a few weeks to earn enough to travel to her next destination. She wore a dirty uniform, and to say that she couldn't have cared less about my uncle when I told her that he had slipped dangerously down the bed would be to put it kindly. The humiliations visited upon many patients under the NHS are so well understood that they are now taken for granted.

Why do the British put up with it, you might ask? One reason is that they have been assiduously indoctrinated with an historical lie, namely that before the institution of the NHS only the rich received medical treatment in Britain, and that therefore all except the rich must now be grateful to receive any treatment whatsoever, no matter how backward or grubby the conditions in which it is given. Thus we have a paradox: that the people in one of the richest countries in the world put up with hospital conditions that no late-Victorian or Edwardian charitable institution for the sick poor would have tolerated.

The father of a friend of mine was a doctor before the NHS, and he was furious at the takeover of hospitals and the medical profession by the state, not only because it meant a loss of professional independence, if not immediately then in the long term, but because it was a misappropriation by the state of institutions that had been built up, sometimes for centuries, by charitable and municipal endeavor, and because it was a means by which a new class of bureaucrats would cheat the poor.

Before the NHS, he and his fellow doctors would charge their patients according to their ability to pay: practically nothing if they were poor, a lot if they were rich. Thus the rich subsidized the treatment of the poor directly, without a lot of the funds sticking to the hands of an intermediary bureaucratic apparatus. Perhaps such a system would not be practicable now; but it was certainly not the case, as is now widely believed, that the poor did not receive treatment. In any case, 75 percent of the population had private medical insurance, and they couldn't all have been rich.

With his film, Michael Moore is trying to foist an untruth upon the American public similar to the historical untruth that has been foisted (with great success) upon the British public.

With his film, Michael Moore is trying to foist an untruth upon the American public similar to the historical untruth that has been foisted (with great success) upon the British public. He is trying to persuade the American public that the American system needs to be replaced by one such as the British, or perhaps even the Cuban.

It is clear that the American system leaves a lot to be desired—as do most systems. It is expensive and not particularly effective when viewed from the point of view of public health. It has strengths, never of course mentioned by Moore: for example, that it is by far the most innovative and performs by far the most important medical research in the world.

Nor is it even a complete public-health disaster: Life expectancy at birth in the United States increased from 75.4 years in 1990 to 77.5 in 2003 (not, incidentally, that people go down the street humming happily about it, suggesting that, within limits, public health is not a major determinant of happiness). And it certainly does not follow from the fact that the American system has weaknesses that the U.S. ought to follow Britain or Cuba, as Moore suggests. As for France: Despite Moore's dithyrambs, its population consumes by far the highest doses of tranquilizers and antidepressants in the world. There must be some reason for it.

Sicko is a slickly made and compelling piece of propaganda masquerading as a serious documentary. You could write an entire book about its errors and omissions. America going to Canada for medical treatment indeed! Just as Italians go to Norway for the sunshine. *Sicko*'s real title is an old one: *Suggestio falsi, suppressio veri.* **NR**

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■ AT WAR

Better Than Genocide

Ethnic cleansing in human affairs

RALPH PETERS

ETHNIC cleansing is evil. It can never be condoned. Yet our repugnance at the act leaves us with a dilemma: What are we supposed to do in cases where ethnic cleansing may be impossible to prevent—cases in which well-intentioned efforts to interrupt ethnic cleansing actually make a conflict deadlier?

One problem we face is a muddle in terminology, employing "ethnic cleansing" and "genocide" interchangeably; in fact, there is a profound difference between these two human habits. Genocide is the attempt to *exterminate* a minority. Ethnic cleansing seeks to *expel* a minority. At its less serious end, ethnic cleansing may aim only at the separation of populations deemed incompatible by at least one side, with psychological, legalistic, or financial machinations brought to bear to achieve the desired end. At the other extreme, ethnic cleansing can involve deadly violence and widespread abuse. In the worst cases, ethnic-cleansing efforts may harden into genocide.

It must never become the policy of the United States to abet ethnic cleansing. Yet our all-or-nothing reaction when confronted with this common human phenomenon has proven to be consistently ineffective, from the Balkans to Iraq. Until we make an honest attempt to understand the age-old human impulse to rid a troubled society of those who are different in ethnicity or religion, we will continue to fail in our efforts to pacify and repair war-ravaged territories. If our conflicts over the past decade and a half offer any lesson, it's that the rest of the world refuses to conform to our idealized notions of how human beings are designed to behave. We never stop insisting that the peoples of the former Yugoslavia, the tribes of Somalia, the ethnic groups of Afghanistan, and, most painfully, the religious and ethnic factions of Iraq learn to live in harmony. Those we hope to convince ignore us.

If ethnic cleansing can be prevented and the society rejuvenated, that's an admirable accomplishment. But not all enraged passions can be calmed, no matter how vociferously we insist otherwise. Once ignited, some human infernos must burn themselves out; and you had best position any fire-breaks correctly. To date, our reactions to situations in which ethnic cleansing cannot be arrested have been inept; in Iraq, for example, well-intentioned attempts to stymie neighborhood ethnic-cleansing efforts may have led to the targets' being murdered as opposed to merely forcibly removed. We struggle to keep families in their homes; in response, the families are massacred in those homes. We pretend that embedded hatreds are transient misunderstandings, but we're not the victims who pay the price for our fantasies.

As uncomfortable as it may be to face the facts, ethnic cleansing has been a deeply ingrained response of human collectives since the dawn of history, and it's preferable to uncompromising genocide.

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A LONG HISTORY

Why do human collectives feel compelled to expel neighbors with whom they may have lived in relative peace for generations, or even centuries? It's a difficult question. The Western model of studying the individual and then extrapolating our findings to the society prevents us from understanding mass behavior, which is far more complex (and murky) than the sum of individual actions. In much of the world—not least, in the Middle East—a more incisive approach is to examine the mass first, then extrapolate to the individual. We're astonished when foreign actors we know as affable individuals are swept up in mob behavior, but the mob may be their natural element and the reasonable character we encountered on a personal level a fragile aberration: Even in our own society, the mass remains more powerful than the man.

A related obstacle to understanding the insidious appeal of ethnic cleansing is that our leaders and opinion-makers interact disproportionately with foreign urban residents who have a higher education level, a greater English-language ability, and a more cosmopolitan outlook than the rest of their society. As a result, we're instructed that a given society doesn't support ethnic cleansing, since there are mixed marriages in Sarajevo or Baghdad or Weimar Germany. But the impulse to expel those who are visibly or behaviorally different—or who are merely accused of being different—is deeply rooted in the human soil. The man in the mansion may tell you one thing, but the unemployed citizen out on the street may bring to bear a very different psychology—along with an inchoate desire for vengeance inseparable from the human condition.

In the Old Testament, you can search fruitlessly through book after book for an example of disparate populations living happily side by side as equals. Ethnic cleansing and genocide appear early and continuously; and it is the differences between the various nationalities and tribes, not the commonalities, that are stressed in the foundational text of our civilization. We read not of a multicultural, tolerant society, but of a chosen people charged to conquer. Tribal genocides erupted throughout history when competition for scarce resources intensified; genocide is fundamentally Darwinian, as one group seeks to annihilate another for its own safety or other perceived benefits. Above the tribal level, though, full-scale genocides have been relatively rare; the more common practice, even in the case of the ever-cited Mongols, was selective mass-murder to instill fear—the slaughter of a city's population to persuade other cities not to resist.

The Romans knew how to punish convincingly, but had little taste for outright genocide. Their preference was for forms of ethnic cleansing that resettled troublesome tribes or dispersed

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rebellious populations—such as the Jews, following the rebellions of the first century A.D. (The Greeks, whose "civilized" behavior was a myth, had been more apt to slaughter rivals, whether in the poetry of Homer or the reportage of Thucydides.) From the Babylonian captivity, down to Stalin's practice of uprooting restive groups (such as the Chechens), ethnic cleansing as a tool of statecraft has a long, if hardly proud, tradition, with genocide reserved as the fail-safe answer.

Further confounding our preconceptions, state-organized programs of ethnic cleansing, for all their heartlessness, look relatively humane compared with the countless outbreaks of ethnic or religious cleansing inspired by roving demagogues, *agents provocateurs*, or simply rumors. While state genocide is the most potent form, state-backed ethnic cleansing tends to be less lethal than popular pogroms, since the state seeks to solve a perceived problem, while the mob wants blood (the horrific genocide perpetrated against the Armenians fatally combined state policy and popular bigotry in a muddle of genocide and ethnic cleansing). Once the people of a troubled society get it into their heads that their neighbors who look or sound or worship differently are enemies bent on subversion, outbursts of extraordinary savagery are the norm.

In this context, ethnic cleansing might be the least horrific of the alternatives. Which atrocity was worse, the French massacre of Protestant Huguenots in the 16th century, or Louis XIV's expulsion of them in the 17th (a process that harmed the French economy, while benefiting German-speaking states)? The Spanish expulsions of the Jews and then the Moors were a vast human tragedy that ravaged Iberian civilization—but weren't those forced exiles preferable to Hitler's attempt to exterminate European Jewry? Even at the extremes of man-wrought evil, there are gradations of cruelty.

The historical evidence is troubling, since it suggests that ethnic cleansing can lead to peace. For example, the German presence amid Slavic populations in northeastern Europe lasted for eight oppressive centuries before all ethnic Germans were expelled in the wake of the Nazi collapse; after almost a millennium of torment, the region now enjoys an unprecedented level of peace and social justice. Certainly, other factors influenced this new calm—but the subtraction of Baltic, Ukrainian, Pomeranian, Silesian, and Sudeten Germans from the social and political equations appears to have been decisive.

In the wake of World War I, Greece and the Turkish rump of the Ottoman Empire exchanged millions of ethnic Turks and Greeks, under miserable conditions. The ethnic cleansing was harsh on both sides and the suffering of these hereditary enemies was immense. Yet, despite their history of violent antagonism, Greeks and Turks have remained at peace for more than eight decades since those mass expulsions, with the conflict over Cyprus confined to that unhappy island.

Meanwhile, trouble spots in which populations remain intermingled continue to erupt in violence, from West Africa through the Middle East to the Subcontinent and Southeast Asia (where anti-Chinese pogroms are almost as predictable as the monsoon season).

Nor can we Americans claim perfect innocence when it comes to ethnic cleansing. Our treatment of Native Americans remains, along with slavery and its consequences, one of the two great stains upon our history. And our present situation goes unexamined: On one hand, the unprecedented degree of ethnic and religious integration we have achieved (largely in the last half-century) blinds us to the depth and operative power of hatreds elsewhere in the world; on the other, our own society has devised innovative, relatively benign forms of achieving ethnic separation. The "gentrification" of neighborhoods in cities such as Washington, D.C., is a soft form of ethnic cleansing by checkbook and mortgage.

There is also an enduring self-segregation of various groups within our society. Many individuals prefer the familiarity and sense of security delivered by a collective identity, by the codes and symbols of belonging, whether displayed in a barrio or in the economic segregation of a suburban gated community. Even in our remarkable multi-ethnic, multi-confessional society, there are still race riots—in the course of which interlopers whose skin is the wrong color end up beaten beyond recognition or dead.

We can deny it as often as we like, but the historical pattern is timeless and enduring: When the majority feels threatened, it lashes out at minorities in its midst.

Human collectives are still, essentially, warrior bands protective of their turf (even in those gated communities—just attend a homeowners' association meeting). Group competition is powerfully embedded in our psyches. Successful societies channel such impulses constructively, but struggling societies and those that have already succumbed to anarchy revert to narrow (and safe) identities—race, tribe, faith, cult—and respond to perceived threats with assertive group behavior: The individual is lost once the group is awakened. We can deny it as often as we like, but the historical pattern is timeless and enduring: When the majority feels threatened, it lashes out at minorities in its midst. When a minority's ethnicity and religion *both* differ from the mainstream of a traditional society, that minority is living on borrowed time. The span of imagined safety may last for centuries, but then, one day, the zealots appear on the street corner, whether in brown shirts or wearing Islamist robes.

THE PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

It cannot be stressed too often or too forcefully that ethnic cleansing is a crime against humanity that cannot be excused.

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The purpose of this essay is to try to understand it—not to condone it—and to consider the implications for our military and diplomatic missions abroad.

Given that we would prefer to prevent any ethnic cleansing, what do we do when it cannot be prevented, when the hatred is too intense and the process already has gone too far? While there will never be a universal answer, given the complexity of each specific case, it can be argued as a case study that ethnic separation at an earlier stage might have prevented the massacre at Srebrenica (of course, no such separations will ever be fully just). Indeed, U.S. diplomats gave tacit approval to the Croatian cleansing of Serbs during the endgame in Croatia and Bosnia. Later, in Kosovo, we sought to persuade Serbs not to drive ethnic Albanians from their homes, but, as soon as victory was delivered to the Kosovars, they set about ethnically cleansing Serbs with high-testosterone vigor. The dynamic in play was such that none of our pleas, lectures, or scoldings were going to alter the hardened attitudes prevailing in either camp. What if the *only* hope for peace in the territory some still pretend is a unified Kosovo is ethnic separation and partition?

Meanwhile, in Iraq, ethnic-cleansing efforts have been savage. They still fall short of genocide: Confessional murders to date have aimed at intimidation and expulsion, at punishment and advantage, not at annihilation. What if the best hope for social peace is the establishment of exclusive Shiite or Sunni (or Kurdish) neighborhoods—or towns and cities and provinces? We aren't alarmed by the existence of various ethnic quarters in Singapore or, for that matter, Brooklyn, and we accept that Saudi Arabia would not welcome an influx of Christian settlers to Riyadh. What if the last chance for Iraq to survive as a unified state is for its citizens to live in religiously or ethnically separate communities? What if efforts to prevent ethnic cleansing in Baghdad, for example, not only are doomed to fail, but exacerbate the ultimate intensity of the violence? Would we really prefer that a family die in its home, rather than be driven from it? Our principles are noble, but it's shabby to expect Iraqis to die for them.

There are no easy answers to these questions. But it should be absolutely clear by now that ethnic cleansing is an issue we will face again and again in the decades ahead, and it may not always be possible or even helpful to stop its march. We must face the unsettling question as to whether it's always desirable to force a halt to such purges, instead of acting to ameliorate the suffering of those displaced.

Idealists will continue to insist that Arabs and Jews, Sunnis and Shiites, Kurds and Turks, Tajiks and Pashtuns, Sudanese blacks and Arabs, or Nigerian Muslims and Christians can all get along. Would that it were so. But to decline to study the possibility that they might refuse to get along, that the individuals we think we know may be consumed by mass passions that reasonable arguments won't tame, is folly. The old military maxim applies: You may hope for the best, but you prepare for the worst.

There is nothing welcome about ethnic or religious cleansing. But if we do not recognize its insistent reemergence in human affairs, and the fact that—in contrast to full-scale genocide—it remains the lesser evil, we will continue to act ineffectually as the innocent suffer. **NR**

■ **PUBLIC POLICY II**

Farmers on The Dole

The crying need for ag reform

STEPHEN SPRUIELL

America has the most innovative and industrious farm community in the world. Contrary to conventional wisdom, most of it gets by without government support—but a small handful of very large producers are stuck in a cycle of dependency on the federal government. Drenched in subsidies, these producers nevertheless face ever-increasing prices for land, fertilizer, and equipment. Shielded from price signals for almost 80 years, they no longer know what to plant or how much to grow without help from the federal government. Shielded from the consequences of expanding beyond what the domestic market can support, they find themselves dependent on the export market—in a world that is increasingly hostile to rich-country farm subsidies.

The ethanol mandate and the biofuels push have mitigated this dire situation in recent years. Sold to the public as renewable-energy programs, they are actually more like sponges designed to soak up enormous amounts of excess corn, sugar, and soybeans—much like the food-stamps and international-food-aid programs before them. But even with these policies driving crop prices to record levels, the House of Representatives is getting ready to pass a new five-year farm bill that will pump another $45 billion of taxpayer money into programs designed to boost prices, support expansion, and increase exports. If the Senate does not show better judgment—taking advantage of this period of high prices to wean farmers from government aid—the only rational thing for President Bush to do is veto the bill, on the grounds that it spends too much, kneecaps our free-trade agenda, and keeps our farmers trapped in a loathsome welfare system.

The bill the House Agriculture Committee finished writing in late July encompasses all the elements that have made the U.S. farm program such a disaster for so long. Generating opposition to, or even interest in, these measures is incredibly difficult simply because it's incredibly difficult even to understand them. The first step in analyzing farm programs, then, is to translate them from jargon-filled statutes into understandable English.

THE FARM SYSTEM

The first thing to understand about farm programs is that the majority of them are created around specific crops. The bulk of farm subsidies go to cotton, corn, wheat, rice, and soybeans, and there are several ways in which the government subsidizes producers of these crops. The most basic of these is the price support. "Target prices" for each crop are enacted through legislation, and if market prices fall below that level then

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farmers receive a payment to make up the difference.

Of course, anyone who is familiar with the concept of supply and demand knows that when you artificially set prices above what buyers are willing to pay, suppliers produce more than the market can absorb, resulting in a surplus. Surpluses tend to drive market prices down even further, and in the case of agricultural price supports that means that the government has to make bigger and bigger payments if farmers aren't given an incentive to reduce supply.

In the past, Congress mandated acreage allotments in order to manage this surplus so that government payments did not spiral out of control. Farmers were subject to strict limits on how much they could grow, and they could be arrested and prosecuted for violating them. Farmers did not like acreage allotments but were convinced that they were a necessary condition of receiving government support—until 1996, when Congress got rid of them and introduced the second basic element of today's farm program: direct payments.

Direct payments are payments a farmer gets whether he grows anything or not. This is the program that got so much attention when the *Washington Post*, as part of its year-long investigation titled "Harvesting Cash," reported last year that the government had paid $1.3 billion in farm subsidies since 2000 to landowners who didn't grow anything. This is because the payments are based on historical rather than current production. If you own land that was used for farming during the "base" period, you get a payment.

By maintaining price supports but shifting some of the money to direct payments, Congress was attempting to discourage overproduction by giving farmers a payment whether or not they actually farmed. It didn't work: With acreage allotments out of the way, farmers pocketed their direct payments and produced record-breaking crops anyway. Only the ethanol boom and aggressive efforts to increase exports—boosted by government mandates and loan guarantees—have prevented the sector from melting down.

This is the context in which the debate over the 2007 farm bill is taking place. But rather than acknowledge economic realities and craft a bill that scales back government support to this overheated industry, the House Agriculture Committee has put forward a draft that is virtually identical to the 2002 farm bill.

To an outsider, this looks like insanity. The U.S. is running a deficit; farm incomes are at record highs; a coalition of environmentalists has united in opposition to the program because it encourages overproduction and wears down the land; small farmers don't like it because 90 percent of the benefits go to a handful of large farming operations; and, finally, the World Trade Organization has ruled that the current system violates international trade agreements, paving the way for other nations to impose retaliatory sanctions on our exporters. The current round of international trade talks has collapsed over this issue.

To veteran observers of farm politics, however, the scene is sadly familiar. A number of political and economic factors have made the environment in Washington very favorable to the continuation of farm programs and hostile to change. First of all, farm programs are a classic case of concentrated benefits and dispersed costs. Like many government transfers, the programs create a small, well-organized, highly concentrated constituency dedicated to maintaining the transfers. Meanwhile, transfers are taken from a large, disorganized, widely dispersed group of taxpayers and consumers that is mostly unaware of what's going on. Therefore, there is strong pressure to maintain the transfers and little pressure to end them.

Second, clever farm-state politicians have rigged the system so that every five years Congress must pass a farm bill or face fiscal catastrophe. First, a little background: In 1948, with prices still high in the aftermath of World War II, Truman's secretary of agriculture, Clinton P. Anderson, proposed a reduction of price supports in anticipation of the inevitable and natural price declines that were expected. The Republican Congress reluctantly went along with the plan, lowering price supports to little more than half the prevailing market prices. The lesson that followed has not been forgotten. The Republican leadership that enacted the reform suffered heavy losses, the worst of which came from farming areas. In the wake of what was viewed as a political nightmare, Congress passed the Agricultural Act of 1949, which jacked price supports back up to their wartime levels. In addition, Congress made the 1949 farm bill "permanent"; as a result, in order to prevent price supports from automatically rising back to the unsustainably high 1949 levels, Congress has to take up a new farm bill approximately every five years.

Third, after emerging from the agriculture committees, which are dominated by farm-state politicians, farm legislation has a good chance of passing through Congress and being signed by the president because farm states wield political power disproportionate to their populations. Farm states such as North Dakota have the same number of senators as nonfarm states such as New Jersey. Similarly, farm states have a majority of electoral votes for president: States such as California, Texas, Florida, and Illinois all have large subsidized farm sectors. Because of the unique political advantages of farm states, the nation's minuscule farm population—less than 1 percent of the total population—receives massive income support.

Fourth, the farm lobby has been heavily involved in politics since the 1930s and has built up a great deal of clout. Each commodity group has its own lobbyists who fight for provisions that benefit its farmers, but farmers as a whole are also represented by several lobbies. The American Farm Bureau Federation, the National Farmers Union, and others take different approaches, but all are united on the key principles that have guided farm programs for the last 80 years. In addition, the agribusiness lobby has become more influential. In 1996, a group of 125 agribusinesses joined forces to push for the elimination of acreage controls so that agricultural production could expand. Aside from that reform, agribusinesses tend to back the status quo: The more subsidies farmers receive, the more they can afford to pay agribusinesses.

Fifth, the U.S. Department of Agriculture acts as a bulwark against major reforms. Created in 1862, it was given a mandate "to acquire and diffuse among the people of the United States useful information on subjects connected with agriculture in the most general and comprehensive sense of that word." Since the 1930s, however, the mission of the USDA primarily has become the management of large income transfers from taxpayers to farmers. As the executor of farm programs, USDA has an incentive to make farm programs appear effective.

A TIME FOR CHANGE?

Each of these policymaking partners—Congress, industry, and bureaucracy—has been historically resistant to changes in farm programs. It took major changes in all of these institutions to create the conditions necessary for the only significant reforms of the last

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60 years—the 1996 "freedom to farm" reforms. At that time, Congress had been taken over by Republicans committed to reducing government spending, farmers were willing to make concessions in exchange for the elimination of acreage allotments, and the administration wanted to reduce the deficit. The result was a bill that reduced price supports and replaced acreage allotments with direct payments that were supposed to be phased out over time.

Nevertheless, another potent political force in agricultural policy was able to undo all of the progress of the 1996 farm bill: the irresistible power of emergency supplemental agriculture appropriations. In a supplemental appropriations bill passed right before the November elections of 1998, was sold as a "disaster relief" program to help farmers suffering from drought and reduced exports in the wake of the Asian financial crisis. Other supplemental bills followed, and by the time the 1996 farm bill expired in 2002, all of its scheduled payment phase-outs had been reversed; payments had instead doubled; crop-insurance subsidies had increased; and payments for oilseeds, apples, peanuts, tobacco, wool, mohair, cottonseed, grazed grain, and cranberries had been tacked on. This kind of out-of-control behavior regarding agricultural supplemental bills is a regular feature of the farm-policy landscape. We saw it happen as recently as last May, when farm-state legislators attached billions in unrelated agricultural spending to a supplemental bill intended primarily to fund the Iraq War.

As that debacle demonstrated, very little has changed about the political forces affecting Congress. But there are a few reasons to be optimistic about the 2007 farm bill. As this magazine went to press, Reps. Ron Kind (D., Wis.) and Jeff Flake (R., Ariz.) were preparing an assault on the House Agriculture Committee's status quo bill, which it sent to the floor in late July. The Kind-Flake proposals would achieve between $5 billion and $10 billion in savings over the next five years by phasing down direct payments, with gradual rate cuts increasing over time at different speeds for different crops. For instance, rate cuts for corn and soybeans would be phased in more quickly because those crops are benefiting the most from the ethanol mandate and the biofuels push.

This would at least begin to address the most urgent problems concerning WTO compliance. It would also start to mitigate the wasteful spectacle of billions of dollars going to landowners who don't farm. As mentioned, it would also save U.S. taxpayers a modest amount of money, with a portion of the $5–10 billion going toward deficit reduction. Most of the savings, however, would go to increased spending on conservation and nutrition programs (food stamps).

This is a sign of the times. In 1994, a wave of conservatives took over both houses of Congress and drove farm-welfare reform from a free-market, limited-government perspective. This year, a wave of Democrats has taken over both houses of Congress, so the coalition Kind and Flake have built includes more Democrats than Republicans and is driven by concerns about the environment and the unequal distribution of benefits under the current system.

Unfortunately, Speaker Nancy Pelosi has announced that she plans to support the status quo bill. She intends to package it as a reform bill based on a woefully inadequate provision, inserted at the last minute, that is supposed to prevent anyone earning over $1 million from getting farm subsidies. This provision does nothing to fix the problems outlined above, but it does allow Pelosi to support a bill that she thinks is vital to the reelection of several Democratic freshmen from rural districts.

In the Senate, things look better. Senate Agriculture Committee chairman Tom Harkin (D., Iowa) has made some public statements indicating that he thinks Congress should pass "a more balanced, reform-minded farm bill that meets the broader needs of rural America." And whereas neither Kind nor Flake serves on the House Agriculture Committee, Sen. Richard Lugar (R., Ind.) is a senior member on the Senate side. Along with Kind and Flake, Lugar favors phasing out direct payments.

Outside Congress, things look better still. Although the farm lobby is still united behind the status quo, Dan Morgan—a journalist who writes for FarmPolicy.com and the *Washington Post*—recently reported that the U.S. business community is opposed to a status quo bill owing to trade concerns. As mentioned above, the current round of multilateral trade negotiations known as the Doha Round has completely collapsed over disputes concerning U.S. and EU farm-subsidy programs. Businesses represented by the Business Roundtable, the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, the National Retail Federation, and other heavyweights stand to gain enormously from a successful Doha Round, and it looks like their patience with the coddled U.S. agricultural sector is finally at an end.

That leaves the Bush administration. President Bush has said he wants a smaller farm bill that spends less money and doesn't interfere with his free-trade agenda, and agriculture secretary Mike Johanns has urged Congress to reduce payment levels. But it is unlikely that Bush would actually veto a bill that doesn't meet these criteria. The pressure to help his party's rural members of Congress and its candidate for president would be extremely high.

The best we can probably hope for this year is some sort of minor improvement to the 2002 farm bill along the lines of what Kind and Flake have proposed in the House. But for Republicans, laying the groundwork for real change should be an urgent priority in the years to come. For 80 years, American farmers have been mismanaged by a government bureaucracy that is not equipped for the job and manipulated by a political class that does not wish to set them free. This is the kind of problem political conservatism was intended to solve, but it's not going to happen unless Republicans start calling the farm program what it is—welfare—and making the case against it in those terms. **NR**

For 75 years, American farmers have been mismanaged by a government bureaucracy that is not equipped for the job.

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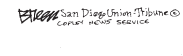
HELP!!!!

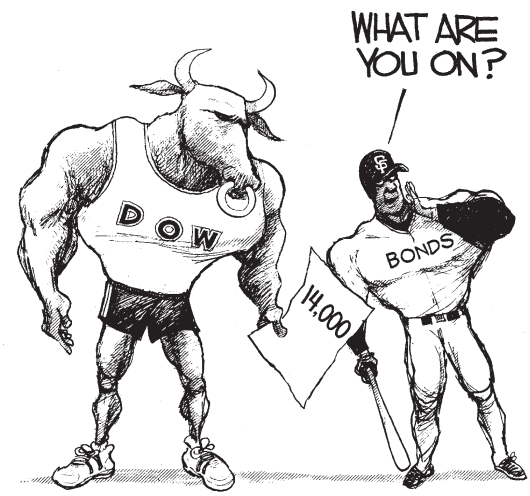
Sorry, Wrong Era

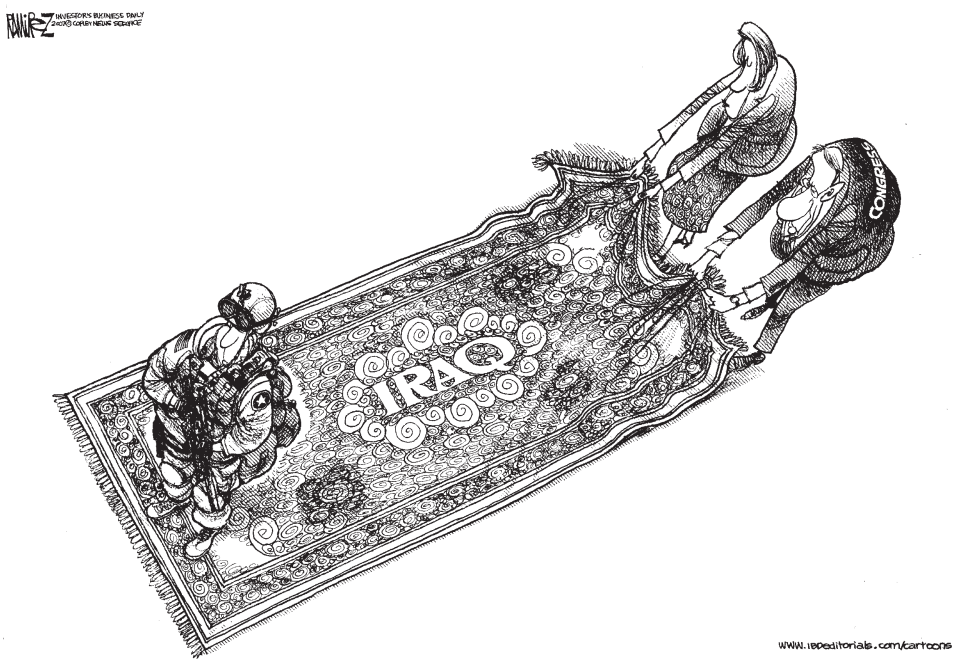
Osama bin Laden's reviving
(Reports on his liver were wrong)
While bobbies in Britain continue
Uncovering more than mah-jongg.
The Democrat party's reliving
Those socialized-medicine days
When Hillary plotted a health plan
And hubby caught Monica's gaze.

—W. H. von Dreele

"Paranoia, eh?—We'll soon beat that *out of you!"*







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the long view

ROB LONG

TRANSCRIPT COURT-ORDERED MEDIATION IN THE MATTER OF:

His Satanic Majesty
plaintiff
v.
President Hillary Rodham Clinton
defendant

Present: His Satanic Majesty (Satan), plaintiff; plaintiff's attorney, Mr. Bertram Fields; President Hillary Rodham Clinton, defendant; defendant's attorney, Mr. Gregory Craig

. . . page 34 . . .

SATAN: (continued from previous page) ". . . she wants the ten million, I get her the ten million. She wants Edwards to fall way behind, I get Edwards to fall way behind, which, by the way, was not an easy thing. I have a lot of side agreements out there, and dumping on Edwards was awfully hard, even for me."

MR. FIELDS: "And what happened subsequent to that?"

SATAN: "Simple. I keep my end of the bargain. I've got a name, you know? A name you can trust. A name that means something. Unlike some people I could mention."

MR. CRAIG: "Objection. Needlessly ad hominem!"

SATAN: "Needlessly ad hominem? That's rich, coming from you and your client. My name has been dragged through the mud by that . . . that . . ."

MR. FIELDS: "Please! Satan! Can we get back on track, here? Can we please discuss January 23, 2009?"

SATAN: "Yes. Okay. I'm sorry. I get a little emotional about all of this and it's hard to, you know, keep a lid on it sometimes. I've got anger problems. A lot of stuff from childhood and whatnot."

MR. FIELDS: "January 23, 2009."

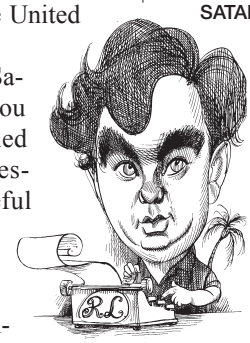
SATAN: "Right, right. Okay. So she's sworn in on the 20th, and I, you know, I'm respectful. I'm respectful of the office. So I give her a few days before dropping by. To settle in, get things squared away, whatever. I mean, what do I know? I'm not president of the United States. She needs a few days, she gets a few days. I'm not a monster. Ask anyone I've done business with. Ask Vladimir Putin, ask Paris Hilton, ask Rupert Mur—"

MR. CRAIG: "Objection! If the plaintiff wants to call character witnesses, let him call character witnesses. Not recite a list of his celebrity friends."

MR. FIELDS: "I think my client was simply mentioning the names of past associates."

MR. CRAIG: "Bert, my client is very very busy. She's president of the United States, for heaven's sakes."

MR. FIELDS: "Okay. Your Satanic Majesty, I wonder if you could tell us what happened when you appeared to President Clinton on that fateful morning?"



SATAN: "I'd be happy to. So, I show up—smell of sulphur, fire, brimstone—a full-dress kind of thing, right? 'Cause I'm thinking, Oval Office, you know, gotta do it right . . ."

MR. FIELDS: "Was this your first time in the Oval Office?"

SATAN: "Are you kidding?"

MR. FIELDS: "You'd been there before?"

SATAN: "I'm Satan, okay? Been there many, many times. Technically, I was undersecretary of state during the Carter administration for a week."

MR. FIELDS: "And how did President Clinton respond to your appearance before her?"

SATAN: "She was all, 'What are you doing here?' Which, frankly, I get a lot. Before my side of the deal is executed, I'm the most popular guy in town. It's 'Satan! Great to see you!' and 'Moloch! Let me buy you a beer!' and then when I've delivered my end, and it's time to collect, it's 'Satan? Satan? I don't think I know a Satan.' So I expected that. But she remembered me, remembered meeting me in L.A. a couple of times—her husband and I go back, obviously—and she remembered our Iowa conversation."

MR. FIELDS: "And could you tell us, please, the gist of that conversation?"

SATAN: "Sure. Basic deal. She gets to be president. I get her immortal soul. I've done this deal, like, a bazillion times."

MR. FIELDS: "And so when you came to collect?"

SATAN: "You should have heard the hemming and hawing. At first she says I can't have her soul until after she leaves office, like she needs it or something. So I show her Polk's portrait and kind of shrug, like, 'Hey, he did okay,' and then she starts in with the quibbling. The backtracking. Unbelievable. Then she says that I didn't fulfill my side."

MR. FIELDS: "But she was elected president?"

SATAN: "Right! And let me tell you, that was not easy, okay? But she says that when we shook, it was to make her 'President Clinton,' not 'a President Clinton.'"

MR. FIELDS: "Meaning that you were expected not only to make her president, but also to eliminate her husband?"

SATAN: "I guess. Which is totally not my style. I don't whack people. If she wants to be a widow, get the sympathy vote, eliminate the whole scandal threat, fine. Let her pay for it like everybody else. But what really got to me was how this whole thing got all bollixed up in semantics. 'A' president, 'the' president, I mean, what does it matter? She's the freakin' president! *Thanks to me!* And so here we are. Because I will not let this matter rest. You know, I went around and around with her husband a few years ago and got royally ripped off because he claims I didn't properly define the term 'lap dance,' and I am telling you right now that I am not going to go through that again. I will have my soul come hell or high water. As it were."

MR. FIELDS: "Thank you, Your Darkness. Mr. Craig, your witness."

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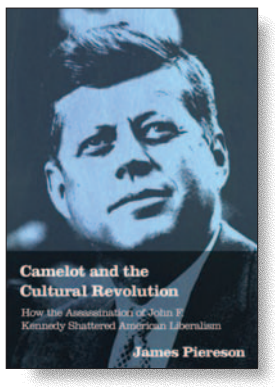
The Madness Begins


Camelot and the Cultural Revolution
How the Assassination of John F. Kennedy Shattered American Liberalism
James Piereson

Camelot and the Cultural Revolution: How the Assassination of John F. Kennedy Shattered American Liberalism, by James Piereson (Encounter, 253 pp., $25.95)

MARK MOYAR

PITIFULLY few subjects in American history have received, or wasted, as much ink as the Kennedy assassination. Conservatives, however, have written very little about the assassination, for among conservatives Kennedy has never commanded the reverence or infatuation he has from the left. Even those on the right who admire Kennedy for his tax cuts and his anti-Communism have been very reluctant to dive into the discussion.

James Piereson, a senior fellow at the Manhattan Institute, has bucked the trend with his provocative and innovative new book. Concentrating on the effects of the event rather than the event itself, Piereson contends that the Kennedy assassination set in motion the sharp leftward turn of liberalism in the late 1960s. The young president's death, says Piereson, shook liberals' confidence in the future and in their own country, transforming them from optimists to pessimists and sapping them of the positive energy that had driven them—and the greater part of the nation—for many decades.

Like most conservatives, Piereson does not pull his hair out over who shot JFK. He accepts the most credible explanation for the assassination, that Lee Harvey Oswald acted alone. The multitudinous theories about larger conspiracies, however, do interest Piereson greatly because of what they say about American liberals.

Piereson stresses that most of the conspiracy theorists blamed American right-wing extremists, inside or outside the U.S. government, for the assassination. In 1963, Dallas was a conservative city with its share of far-right fanatics, so certain people could easily be persuaded that sinister right-wing forces had orchestrated the killing. Later, after Hollywood and the media had repeatedly demonized the military and the CIA, there would be fertile ground for the idea that rightist military or CIA elements had assassinated Kennedy.

In *Camelot and the Cultural Revolution*, Piereson argues convincingly that liberal Kennedy admirers espoused the conspiracy theories because they cared more about civil rights than the Cold War and therefore considered it much more noble for the president to have been assassinated by a right-wing opponent of civil rights than by a Communist. If Oswald was guilty of the crime, moreover, it would highlight something Kennedy admirers tried to hide but which Kennedy biographers such as Richard Reeves, Thomas C. Reeves, and Robert Dallek have fully illuminated—that Kennedy himself was much more interested in combating Communism than in promoting civil rights and other domestic liberal causes.

Absolving Oswald had other benefits for liberals. Since the days of Alger Hiss, liberals had been claiming that conservative accusations of Communist machinations in the United States were bogus witch hunts, motivated by partisan politics or various psychological maladies. To admit that an American Communist had killed Kennedy would be to admit that the conservatives had been right. In addition, many liberals, including Lyndon Johnson, worried that if the Communist Oswald took the blame for the assassination, then conservatives would be encouraged to undertake new McCarthyist investigations into domestic subversion, to the detriment of the Democratic party and Johnson's Great Society. Here, as Piereson points out, Kennedy's posthumous fans misrepresented the deceased president again, for Kennedy himself had been on friendly terms with Joseph McCarthy and had supported McCarthy's efforts to ferret out Communist spies in the American government.

In explaining the political impact of the assassination, Piereson emphasizes that, from the outset, many Kennedy admirers blamed his death on violent streaks in the United States, which they attributed to far-right opponents of civil rights. (The leftist violence of the Weathermen and the Black Panthers had not yet arisen.) From that assertion and some twisted logic, Piereson deftly shows, came the charge that the country as a whole was guilty of Kennedy's murder and the conclusion that the U.S. itself was violent and racist and corrupt, and not the great nation that liberals had previously perceived. Pessimism and hatred came in tow.

According to Piereson, the transformative effects of the Kennedy assassination were a few years in the making. Some major liberal achievements, such as the Civil Rights Act and Medicare, transpired in 1964 and 1965. After 1965, numerous liberals adopted the radicalism of Norman Mailer, Allen Ginsberg, and Jack Kerouac, while others moved in that direction without going all the way. The radicals of the early 1960s had disliked Kennedy because he was too far to the right, but after his death they used the misrepresentation of Kennedy as a civil-rights hero to portray him as ushering in the "liberating" changes of the late 1960s.

The liberalism of the 1950s and early 1960s—which had some conservative elements, including respect for tradition and aversion to radical change—was thrown out, to be replaced with an angry determination to liberate individuals by destroying the authority of parents, husbands, and sexual mores, and by destroying dangerous ideas like sexism, racism, religion, and patriotism. In accordance with this negativity and destructiveness, states Piereson, the new liberalism advocated punitive measures such as high taxation, affirmative action, and "multiculturalism." Because the new liberal message had little appeal

Mr. Moyar is the author of *Triumph Forsaken: The Vietnam War, 1954–1965*.

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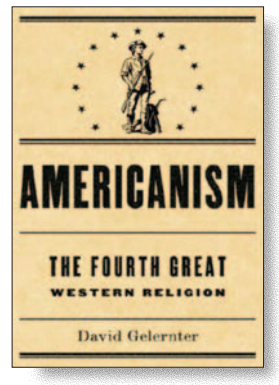
for the American public, liberals would pursue these policies in courts and regulatory agencies. Piereson also argues that the new negative liberalism has endured ever since the late 1960s, surviving even the trauma of 9/11. The behavior of Nancy Pelosi, Harry Reid, and other Democrats in Congress fits this interpretation nicely.

Camelot and the Cultural Revolution goes so far as to say that had blame for the JFK assassination been correctly assigned to the Communist Oswald, there would not have been widespread radicalism in the late 1960s. Liberals would have been repelled by Communism and would have been unwilling to move in that direction. Nor would they have become convinced that America was possessed by horrible right-wing extremists. This assertion is the most difficult aspect of Piereson's argument to prove, if such an assertion can be proven at all. As Piereson himself acknowledges, it is extremely difficult to separate the influence of the Kennedy assassination from the influence of other major factors such as the civil-rights movement, the Vietnam War, and the coming of age of the Baby Boomers.

Like previous writers, Piereson observes that the leftward shift of liberalism in the late 1960s was a boon for conservatives, as left-wing excesses caused large elements of American society to move to the right. By turning pessimistic, the liberals separated themselves from the optimism inherent in the American people. Conservatives, who were pessimistic until the 1970s, stole the mantle of optimism under the leadership of Ronald Reagan, and they have held it—and the American public—ever since. Reagan also appropriated Kennedy's view of the United States as the champion of the world's free people and his belief in cutting taxes to promote economic growth. These principles have remained Republican staples, and only a few centrist Democrats have tried to steal them back (without success).

Piereson has made a major contribution to the literature on the Kennedy assassination. By focusing on the event's lasting effects, he provides important new insights into the political and cultural upheavals of the late 1960s. Like most decades of the 20th century, the 1960s need more such histories by conservative authors, so that we can question the historical interpretations that the Left, with its dominance of the media and academia, has deeply entrenched. **NR**

Apologia Americana



Americanism: The Fourth Great Western Religion, by David Gelernter (Doubleday, 240 pp., $24.95)

CHRISTOPHER LEVENICK

America, Chesterton famously observed, is a nation with the soul of a church. The remark is often misunderstood as a comment on the ubiquity of religious profession and practice in the United States, but it was actually an insight into America's sense of itself. Chesterton recognized that Americans regard their country in religious terms—not merely in the intensity of their devotion, but also in their conviction that to belong is to profess a certain creed: "We hold these truths . . ." Other nations may have myths and rituals, but America is unique in also having doctrines.

David Gelernter wholeheartedly agrees with Chesterton's observation, and then some. His new book, *Americanism*, argues that this sentiment is not *like* a religion—it *is* a religion. He calls this religion "Americanism," and considers it "a new force in the world's spiritual history." Gelernter is a true polymath—professor of computer science at Yale, political columnist, scientist, art critic, novelist, and painter—so it is unsurprising that his book draws upon multiple disciplines. By turns employing theology, ethics, and history, he proposes that Americanism is, in the words of the book's subtitle, "the fourth great Western religion."

Gelernter traces the origins of this new religion to two formative concepts: the Covenant and the Creed. The Puritans, drawing on the Hebrew Scriptures, first introduced the idea of the Covenant to British North America. They imagined themselves, like the Israelites of old, engaged in an intimate relationship with the Almighty—a relationship they believed conferred great blessings, but incurred still greater responsibilities. As Puritanism waned, this sensibility transformed into what Gelernter calls "American Zionism," the "passionate belief in the community's *closeness* to God and its obligation *to God and the whole world—Americans as a new chosen people, America as a new promised land*" (italics his).

The second formative concept—the Creed—developed during the Founding. Informed by Biblical concepts and Enlightenment principles, it maintains that "liberty, democracy, and equality [are] for all mankind." Creed and Covenant gradually fused into Americanism, as Americans came to discover that their covenantal obligation was the worldwide propagation of the Creed. "The American Religion consists of this Creed in the context of American Zionism."

Gelernter credits Abraham Lincoln with elevating Americanism and redirecting it outwards, to the world. The latter chapters thus follow the course of Americanism during the American Century. Woodrow Wilson is presented as a pivotal figure, a leader who backed his belief in America's global responsibilities with force of arms. Gelernter admires such muscular idealism, and draws a direct line of descent from Wilson to Truman, Reagan, and George W. Bush. Americanism, Gelernter concludes, has in recent decades been bowed but not broken; its vitality has been proven in Afghanistan and Iraq.

In conception, Gelernter's thesis is perfectly legitimate—debatable, to be sure, but certainly defensible. In execution, however, the book falters. The problems range from little to great, but their cumulative effect impedes the argument Gelernter hopes to advance.

To begin with, the book suffers from a number of historical inaccuracies. Within the span of eight pages, for instance,

Mr. Levenick lives in Alexandria, Va.

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Gelernter makes three straightforward errors of fact. He suggests that the Mexican–American War ended in 1846; in fact, it ended in 1848. He describes the presidential contest of 1860 as a three-party election; in fact, there were four major candidates. He writes that Lincoln spent his youth "hunting and trapping"; in fact, Lincoln wrote in 1860 that, at age seven, he shot and killed a wild turkey, but "never since pulled a trigger on any larger game." Mistakes like these ill befit a book that laments America's estrangement from its past.

More serious are the book's structural flaws. Underlying the narrative is an anachronistic Anglo-Protestant Whig triumphalism, which might be charming, were it not so misleading. England, Gelernter alleges, has traditionally treated with exceptional seriousness "morality, religion, and the spiritual side of life," and the English Bible was "a needle that punctured the ancient weave of medieval ignorance." (Be it noted that Voltaire learned Deism in the coffee houses of London, and that Aquinas, Dante, and Michelangelo all managed to get by without the King James Version.) Such statements may tickle the inner Anglophile, but as serious analysis they leave much to be desired.

Likewise problematic are the matters omitted. Entirely absent from Gelernter's account is the possibility of a principled reluctance to involve the United States in the affairs of other nations. Not a word is whispered of George Washington's warnings against foreign alliances, or of John Quincy Adams's refusal to go abroad in search of monsters to destroy, or of "Spotty" Lincoln's objections to the war against Mexico. Americanism, it would seem, cannot ever be content to guard and cherish its own hard-won liberty. According to Gelernter, it is inherently expansionistic; it has "no *right* to help no one" (italics his).

The celebration of crusading Americanism is most evident in the book's closing chapters. Gelernter lauds every assertion of America's global responsibility as an unqualified good, and ranks presidents by their perceived willingness to spread the American Creed. Wilson is thus rated superior to Franklin Roosevelt, because Wilson did not need to be "pushed" into war. (Moreover, "George W. Bush is a student of Wilson and shares his idealism"—an evaluation Gelernter intends as highest praise.) Rhetorical excess marks much of these chapters, and Gelernter too often descends into pointless, petty ridicule, like his sneer at the "spike-decorated clown hats" of the Kaiser's armies. (Do clowns wear spike-decorated hats?)

None of which is to deny a crusading element to Americanism, nor to suggest that it has never served the good, nor to deny that Gelernter correctly locates its origins in Puritanism. Yet, for all that, I still think he overemphasizes the role of Puritan covenantal theology in inspiring what he calls American Zionism. Americans long ago abandoned the central tenets of Puritan covenantalism, from its scrupulous Biblical typology to its belief in collective responsibility for individual sinfulness. (To the Puritans, the late Jerry Falwell's ascription of 9/11 to personal transgressions would have been unobjectionable, even banal.)

To sanctify the nation is to trespass into the primordial sin of pride.

It was rather the Puritans' intense desire for the personal experience of God's saving grace that presaged so much of later American spiritual life. From the 18th-century Awakening to the modern megachurch, this heightened emotional individualism has produced a correspondingly diminished ecclesiology. Covenantal rhetoric lingers, but it cloaks a low-church sensibility. A covenant, after all, is instituted by God; a denomination assembles voluntarily. As their denominations lost a sacramental dimension, American Protestants began to find spiritual solidarity not within the walls of a church, but within the borders of the nation.

And therein lies the danger. To sanctify the nation is to trespass into the primordial sin of pride. Against that presumption America has no greater prophet than Abraham Lincoln. Lincoln's Second Inaugural Address—which Gelernter correctly hails as "the incandescent core" of American religious history—thunders against the temptation of national arrogance. At the very moment Northerners believed their righteousness confirmed by victory, Lincoln counseled humility: "The Almighty has His own purposes." But to Gelernter, the Second Inaugural is a call to arms, a proclamation of "Americanism as (potentially) a world religion with global responsibilities" and a statement of America's "mission to all mankind."

This strikes me as deeply misguided. Lincoln's Second Inaugural is an exercise in penitence; it pays homage to the inscrutable will of God, and praises Him for His just chastisement. Americanism, Lincoln realized, was to be judged by something greater than American principles. If Lincoln is right, then Americanism does not provide America with its fullest scope of meaning nor its final set of morals. It is not, therefore, a religion.

And yet that is precisely what Gelernter repeatedly insists Americanism is—a *religion*. Suppose for a moment that he is right; suppose Americanism is indeed a religion. Were that the case, it would necessarily entail that Americanism is something different from, and in some sense opposed to, Judaism and Christianity. Gelernter dislikes that implication, however, and flatly denies that this new religion is "a blasphemous replacement for Christianity or Judaism." To the contrary, Americanism represents an "extension to [their] structure" or "an extra room out back."

These two propositions are difficult to reconcile. If Americanism is a religion—particularly if, as Gelernter claims, it is a religion compatible with atheism, agnosticism, Islam, Hinduism, Marxism, *and* paganism—then it is incompatible with orthodox Judaism or Christianity. If, however, Americanism is not a religion—if, say, it is a cluster of political ideas, deeply heartfelt, yes, but ultimately contingent and temporal—then the central argument of Gelernter's book collapses.

And yet, for all its deficiencies, the book asks important questions and points towards legitimate conclusions. Its author is a brilliant thinker and prolific writer, who will no doubt return to these themes. When he does, it is eagerly to be wished that the effort will be commensurate with the full measure of his talent. Regrettably, *Americanism* is not. **NR**

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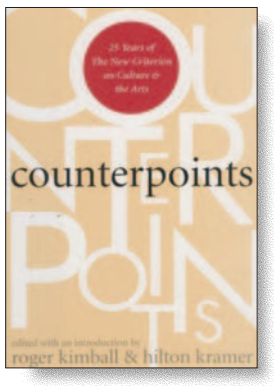
Ad Multos Annos!



Counterpoints: 25 Years of The New Criterion on Culture and the Arts, edited by Roger Kimball and Hilton Kramer (Ivan R. Dee, 512 pp., $35)

BRIAN C. ANDERSON

A QUARTER-CENTURY ago, Hilton Kramer, the former chief art critic of the *New York Times*, and the late Samuel Lipman, a distinguished pianist and critic, started a highbrow, small-circulation monthly review of the arts and intellectual life. The writer Roger Kimball, who joined *The New Criterion* a few years after its founding and is now co-editor and co-publisher, recently described the complacent, left-dominated cultural attitude that the magazine sought to explode. "Standards—aesthetic as well as intellectual—were low, but then so were expectations," he told *FrontPage Magazine*:

> Words like "transgressive" and "challenging" had just begun their bizarre mutation into terms of critical commendation, while traditional epithets such as "beautiful," "technically accomplished," even "true" were drifting into desuetude. What the historian Elie Kedourie called "the Chatham House Version"—that toxic amalgam of smugness, moral relativism, and cherished feelings of guilt about the achievements of Western civilization—everywhere nurtured the catechism of established opinion.

The Italian philosopher Rocco Buttiglione calls this ethos the "suicide of culture," and worries that, unless reversed, it spells real trouble for the West.

Since Day One back in 1982, *The New Criterion* has pursued a twofold critical vocation, seeking to do away with that still-pervasive worldview—and to replace it. Its first task has been relentlessly negative: "the gritty job of intellectual and cultural trash collector," as Kimball and Kramer put it in their introduction to this new anthology. A lengthy section of this book, "Contentions," collects essays that fall under this heading, and they're a joy to read (or re-read). Here's the opening of one, by David Pryce-Jones: "Eric Hobsbawm is no doubt intelligent and industrious, and he might well have made a notable contribution as a historian. Unfortunately, lifelong devotion to Communism destroyed him as a thinker or interpreter of events." No minced words there! In muscular prose, Pryce-Jones shows how Hobsbawm's intellectual failings—his see-only-the-bad-side view of democratic capitalism and his whitewashing of Communist atrocities—grow out of a deeper moral failure, an icy indifference to human suffering.

Hobsbawm's is just one inflated leftist reputation punctured. Other targets include Noam Chomsky, whose apologetics for the Khmer Rouge and al-Qaeda come under withering fire from Australian historian Keith Windschuttle; the bloodthirsty anti-colonialist Franz Fanon, who achieved "the Platonic form of human resentment," according to the brilliant Anthony Daniels (who also appears in *Counterpoints* as Theodore Dalrymple); liberal jurists, exposed by Judge Robert Bork in one of the sharpest essays on American constitutionalism you'll ever read; PC curators at the Smithsonian, mocked by *City Journal*'s Heather Mac Donald; and many more. The book, like the magazine, features dose after dose of emperor-has-no-clothes truth-telling. The cumulative effect is bracing.

Mr. Anderson is editor of *City Journal* and the author of *Democratic Capitalism and Its Discontents*, just out from ISI Books, and *South Park Conservatives*.

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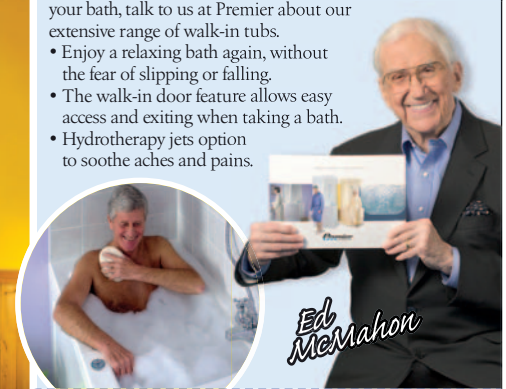

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The New Criterion's intellectual mission has also been constructive: restoring Western civilization's greats to their proper status. In an era when the university and other elite institutions have refused to uphold "the best that is known and thought in the world" (Matthew Arnold)—worse, have relentlessly attacked it as racist or sexist or classist—Kimball and Kramer have offered an ongoing, ten-times-a-year, high-level education in the humanities. In the section called "Recuperations," readers will find some splendid examples. My favorite is Joseph Epstein's "The Intimate Abstraction of Paul Valéry," which places the French poet and aphorist—"Everything changes but the avant-garde" is one of his many memorable maxims—in a tradition of thinkers that includes Montaigne and Henry James, "whose strength is in the texture and subtlety, the sensibility, of their minds" (something one could say about Epstein himself). John Buchan, Lord Acton, F. R. Leavis, Aldous Huxley, and Russell Kirk, among others, also receive sympathetic, if not uncritical, assessments. These essays open up worlds of further reading and reflection.

The New Criterion has always excelled in big think-pieces, ambitious efforts to capture the spirit of the age. These pieces often are not aesthetic in any narrow sense, but instead political or moral, concerned with "the right conduct of life," in Socrates' phrase. An impressive example in this collection is Mark Steyn's mordant "It's the Demography, Stupid," which describes a Europe seemingly on its way to cultural extinction, colonized from within by alienated Islamists, whom the desiccated elites of Europe can't muster enough force to resist; these ideas inspired Steyn's bestseller *America Alone*. Kenneth Minogue's "'Christophobia' and the West" is notable for its discussion of "Olympianism," a view, increasingly prevalent among anti-Christian elites, that seeks "human betterment . . . on a global scale by forging the peoples of the world into a single community based on the universal enjoyment of appropriate human rights." Kimball himself offers "The Fortunes of Permanence": This manifesto, which opens the book, emphasizes the importance of high culture, the dangers of multiculturalism, and the mistake of conflating technological progress (however worthy when used properly) with human flourishing.

Everything in this book is readable—often compulsively so—which points to another aspect of *The New Criterion* that deserves notice: It's a superbly edited publication. Whether it's a measured assessment of Robert Alter's translation of the Hebrew Bible or a review of Balanchine at the New York City Ballet or a Max Beckmann exhibit at the Guggenheim, sentences logically follow one another, as do paragraphs and themes; transitions make perfect sense. Now, many of *The New Criterion*'s writers are among our great prose stylists—Dalrymple, Epstein, and Steyn heading the list. But Kimball, Kramer, and the magazine's other editors surely deserve credit here, too. Given that so much of the postmodern humbug that *The New Criterion* struggles against is hermetic and jargon-heavy, it's fitting that the magazine, and this book drawn from its pages, is filled with good writing.

Much has changed since *The New Criterion*'s founding; the Soviet Union, for example, is no more. But the apocalyptic anti-culture of Islamic radicalism has become a new existential threat to Western civilization, which the continuing influence of multiculturalism and cultural relativism in our universities and media makes harder to oppose. *The New Criterion*'s educational mission is all the more essential in such a context. At times, as Kimball and Kramer observe, "the enemies of civilization transform the task of preserving culture into a battle for survival."

Another thing that has changed is popular culture: For Kimball and Kramer, pop culture is a catastrophe, spirit-dimming when it isn't spirit-killing. But I'm not sure that such a blanket condemnation is as true in 2007 as it was in 1982 or 1992. I don't think it captures, for instance, the growing complexity and artistic achievement evident these days on television, in remarkable dramas like HBO's *The Sopranos* or its mind-bending new surf-noir *John from Cincinnati*.

But that's a very minor quibble. *The New Criterion* is a national treasure. For those who haven't discovered it yet, *Contentions* is an ideal gateway. Here's to the next quarter-century. **NR**

After the Fall

Falling Man,
by Don DeLillo
(Scribner, 256 pp., $26)

PETER SUDERMAN

In 1945, Theodor Adorno famously said that "after Auschwitz, writing poetry is barbaric." But the poets kept on writing, and the Holocaust itself became a fixture of the literary scene. In the immediate wake of 9/11, many artists—poets, filmmakers, novelists—were similarly skeptical of the ability of art to respond to such an event, as well as the appropriateness of trying to do so. Yet in the years since, those concerns seem to have been lost, as that day has spawned numerous movies, poems, paintings, and novels. Indeed, we have seen the birth of a new creative niche: 9/11 art.

This is hardly surprising. For those looking to make their mark as Serious, Important Artists, 9/11, with its incumbent spectacle and political upheaval, as well as its guaranteed emotional wallop, makes for an attractive subject. Don DeLillo's new novel, *Falling Man*, which begins in the burning wreckage of the towers and circles back to end with the impact of the first plane, might appear to be just another entry in this burgeoning subgenre. But despite the showy set-pieces with which it opens

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and closes, *Falling Man* is not really a novel about the destruction of the World Trade Center and the way it rocked America and the world. No, DeLillo, ever the modernist, has taken the meta path: He doesn't so much examine 9/11 itself as explore our fraught and fearful reactions to it—our art, our relationships, our thoughts, and their utter inadequacy in the face of catastrophe and evil.

The book opens with the protagonist, Keith Neudecker, staggering away from the wreckage of the towers, outrunning walls of black ash and picking glass out of his wounds. He heads uptown to the apartment of his estranged wife, Lianne, with whom he has a son. The rest of the novel largely concerns the quick rekindling of their relationship and its slow disintegration over the next few years, as Keith takes to spending weeks away from home having affairs and living the life of a professional gambler. Lianne, a freelance book editor, passes time by teaching a writing course to people in the early stages of Alzheimer's, talking art with her art-historian mother, thinking endlessly about Islam and terrorism, and conversing about the state of the world with an old lover who appears to have a history as a radical left-wing European terrorist. And, every so often, she catches a glimpse of a performance artist who calls himself the Falling Man, suspending himself in a suit and tie above the streets of the city, upside down, an eerie living replica of those who leapt from the top floors of the burning towers.

Other threads appear and disappear, but there's no narrative to speak of, just imagistic fragments of post-9/11 existence. Like the lives of its two central characters, the narrative—indeed, the entire *idea* of narrative—has been shattered. Many scenes appear out of order, and the book constantly returns to 9/11: Keith's dazed escape and walk out of downtown, Lianne's helpless worrying from her midtown apartment. Whatever they do afterwards—gamble, sleep around, attend anti-war rallies—seems futile, a desperate attempt to regain something that, like the memories of Lianne's class of Alzheimer's-afflicted writers, is permanently lost. These are lives in pieces, blown apart by the fall of the towers, unable to put it all back together and get beyond that morning.

It's a picture of a world hanging in limbo, on the verge of death but not yet dead, and the writing reflects this sense of doomed stasis. DeLillo has always been a stylist above all else, less a novelist than an artist who works in prose. He writes spare, compact sentences that seem to glide over their subjects, cool and distanced, clipped of feeling, just sparse physical descriptors arranged into careful, still-life images:

> Everything was painted brownish rust, the upper tiers of coarse granite, the barrier he'd just passed through and the platform itself, a slatted metal structure resembling a large fire escape, twelve feet long and six wide, accessible normally to workers on the tracks or those at street level arriving in a maintenance truck equipped with vertical boom and open bucket.
>
> A train went by, southbound again.

At times, it's more or less pure poetry; add a few line breaks and you'd have William Carlos Williams. But after the horrors of 9/11, the book seems to ask, What else is there? Raw images, without context, feeling, or order, are all that remain. The enduring terror of 9/11 is that it robbed life of meaning. As a friend of a 9/11 victim says to Lianne, "If it's cancer, then it's lung cancer and we blame him. But this, what happened, it's way too big, it's outside someplace, on the other side of the world."

The title, *Falling Man*, refers to a number of things: the performance artist that Lianne sees; the famous real-life photo on which the artist's act is based; Keith, who circles in and out of both gambling halls and his life as husband and father in New York. But it's misleading in that it suggests movement; the performer only *mimics* falling. He seems to show the fall, but there's no true motion; the same is true for Keith. He's static, hovering, not in actual freefall, but in something that looks like it.

Stuck there, frozen in a death-plummet, Keith and Lianne—like so many others—struggle to break free, hoping to regain their old sense of purpose and forward movement. They try everything: rebuilding their old family, starting new lives as hard-living heathens, spending time with parents, revisiting old flames, desperately studying Muslim culture and religion in hopes of finding clues. Lianne watches the artist as he reenacts those horrifying suicide leaps. His art and their actions are all attempts to cope, to process, to react. But they all fail, and so they remain, head pointed toward the ground, caught in the midst of a perpetual final dive. For what images, words, or art would be a sufficient response?

Early in the 20th century, Antonin Artaud, frustrated with the "psychological" fixations of traditional drama, called for a theater that "inspires us with the fiery magnetism of its images and acts upon us like a spiritual therapeutics whose touch can never be forgotten." What he was getting at was the inadequacy of art to capture those grand, unspeakable moments—such as 9/11—and to heal us from them. In *Falling Man*, everyone is looking for "spiritual therapeutics," but nothing works. What DeLillo offers is a critique of both 9/11 art and all the mindless, soulless activity that's supposed to provide comfort after catastrophe, but serves only as a faint echo of the original event. Not even the highest art will repair those blighted lives, forever suspended in the appearance of a fall. **NR**

AMERICAN GOTHIC

It came with the house—
God in the attic;
And a stream underground
That made him rheumatic.

Why shouldn't he be
Self-righteous?—the mortgage
Almost paid up & the kids gone
To war and marriage.

It's a good house
Still, he tells himself,
And the heater may hold
Through another winter;

For the heavy ghost
Who creaks on the stairs
And stoops by the window
To peer out at stars.

—RICHARD O'CONNELL

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■ SHELF LIFE ■

Auld Kirk

MICHAEL POTEMRA

ALAN WOLFE's enraged essay on Russell Kirk in *The New Republic* earlier this summer underscores a problem many people of a rationalist, coolly logical cast of mind—liberals and conservatives alike—have with Kirk. It's not so much that they disagree with him (though many, of course, do) as that they find him extremely irritating. His thought doesn't engage them on their own terms, and—as a result—his declarations appear to them pompous, and intellectually vacuous. The way I have tried to explain Kirk to his detractors is that he is not a dogmatic prescriptivist, seeking to deduce political ideas from axioms and then impose them on the recalcitrant. What he is, rather, is a poet of the possible, who tries to awaken our imaginations to some of the roads less traveled by modern man.

Gerald J. Russello, editor of *The University Bookman*, sees the postmodern era as much more receptive to a thinker like Kirk. His new book, ***The Postmodern Imagination of Russell Kirk*** (Missouri, 248 pp., $44.95), lays out Kirk's thought in this congenial new context:

> On several occasions Kirk spoke approvingly of the beginning of a postmodern era to replace an exhausted modernity. This new period would dispense with liberalism's reliance on "defecated rationality" and empty theory. Instead, Kirk envisioned an Age of Sentiments to supplant the modern Age of Discussion. . . . Sentiment, which Kirk defined as "a moving conviction . . . a conviction derived from some other source than pure reason," would replace the cold reason Kirk found characteristic of modernity.

So characteristic, indeed, that even many conservatives bridle at Kirk's notions as so much Romantic tosh. But is it not Kirk himself who is more true to the great philosophical tradition? After all, he is asking us to examine not just our means but our ends, to search for that wisdom about man and God that reaches our existential core. Is it likely that this wisdom will be perfectly transparent to human reason, and in conformity with its practical laws? Isn't Hamlet right, when he warns Horatio that "there are more things in heaven and earth"?

It is here Kirk finds an echo in the postmodern mind—and both together encounter the fury of the Defenders of Reason, who see postmodernism as an attack on the knowability of truth. Yet Kirk, like the best of the postmodernists, is calling not for a radical relativism—i.e., an assertion that truth doesn't exist—but for a humility of the intellect. The postmodernist challenges us to learn from the aspects of the truth presented by today's less powerful voices; the traditionalist Kirk asks us to show the same respect for those who are less powerful because they are voices of the past. (This idea is echoed in Chesterton's phrase "democracy of the dead.") Modernity viewed the past as an oppressor whose shackles must be removed from thought, but postmodernism can view the past the way a healthy new republic treats its former king: He is no longer king, but he must not be denied the full rights of citizenship—for he, too, has much to teach us.

Like the postmodernists, Kirk presents us with what has been called a "romance of the marginal." Gerald Russello's fine book demonstrates how looking at the margins can give us directions to the moral and intellectual center; how Lyotard's "crisis of narratives" can yield a vision of the permanent things.

■ Edward Feser is one of the best contemporary writers on philosophy, and his ***Locke*** (Oneworld, 178 pp., $14.95) is a lucid short introduction to this architect of philosophical modernity. "To understand Locke," Feser writes, "is to understand ourselves"—because the tensions within Lockeanism remain alive within, and indeed central to, today's intellectual life. John Locke was simultaneously committed to a political philosophy of natural rights and an epistemological nominalism: But how can rights be inherent in the human "kind" if the very definition of a "kind" is an arbitrary human invention? What Locke wants, according to Feser, is "a natural law without nature, or at least without a 'nature' that would have been recognizable to his medieval predecessors. . . . His basic philosophical commitments do in fact tend to undermine natural law and the conservative moral and political conclusions that follow from it."

■ Who among us is not in love with coincidences? A couple of months ago, on Trinity Sunday, I was scheduled to be ordained a deacon at my church. On Friday night, two days before the ceremony, I sat down to read a biography of Nicholas Ferrar—of whom all I knew was that he was the Anglican founder of the Little Gidding religious community celebrated in Eliot's *Four Quartets*. Imagine my amazement, then, when I read that the turning point in Ferrar's life came in 1626 . . . *when he was ordained a deacon on Trinity Sunday*.

Coincidences like this are food for the soul, because they give us a hint—in the face of life's terrifying complexities—that at bottom, things make sense; that history has an Author. The religious view of life sees in coincidence a metaphor for how all realities—even, and perhaps especially, those that frighten and confuse us—cohere in God. Fr. George Rutler, a Catholic priest in Manhattan, has just published a delightful book, ***Coincidentally*** (Crossroad, 222 pp., $14.95), that revels in this world of pregnant juxtapositions. Rutler recounts hundreds upon hundreds of these, "the study of which," he reminds us, "can raise us above the mire of the merely banal to the shimmering heights of the baroquely arcane."

Here's one of Rutler's best stories:

> Having conquered Persia, Central Asia, and breathtaking stretches of Russia, India, and Asia Minor, Tamerlane chose to be buried near his birthplace in Samarkand of Uzbekistan. The fatal year was 1405. He ordered the epitaph: "If I should be exhumed, the worst of all wars will overwhelm this land." At 5 a.m. on June 22, 1941, Soviet scientists uncovered Tamerlane's remains. At the same hour, the German army crossed the Russian border.

Can we go so far as to see in this a suggestion that the Calvinists are right about predestination? On this, I am (just barely) unqualified to speculate, having been born two days shy of the 400th anniversary of the death of Calvin . . . NR

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■ FILM ■

A Few Charms

ROSS DOUTHAT

I DON'T envy anyone the task of adapting a Harry Potter novel for the screen; it's a thankless assignment that I wouldn't take on if you paid me. Well, all right, maybe I'd do it if you paid me . . . and okay, I'd probably do it for free . . . and fine, maybe I'd empty out my savings and pay *you* for the privilege. (Warner Brothers, are you listening?) But the original point stands. J. K. Rowling's novels are well-nigh unadaptable, and the proof is in the pudding. Of the five Potter films to date, only Alfonso Cuarón's *Prisoner of Azkaban* has soared more than a broomstick-length above the pedestrian, or conjured up enough cinematic magic to rival its beloved source material.

Rowling's books succeed by blending a host of different genres: Her fantasy landscape is closer to C. S. Lewis's Narnia than Tolkien's Middle-Earth, a mythological pastiche more than a proper sub-creation, and she takes the pastiche further than even Lewis did, filtering the fantasy through a *Tom Brown's Schooldays* setting and a red-herring-strewn, Agatha Christie style of plotting. In a big, baggy book this comes off marvelously, but it's murder on a screenwriter. You can be faithful to Rowling's originals and find yourself losing any chance of narrative thrust in the subplot-strewn sprawl of her wizarding world; or you can compress the story and gain the momentum that cinema requires, while sacrificing all the flourishes and complications that make the books worthwhile.

This dilemma has impaled every Potter movie so far. The hackish Chris Columbus, of *Home Alone* fame, chose the slavishly faithful approach in the first two films, turning out lifeless, ponderous white elephants that felt like the most expensive school plays ever mounted. Alfonso Cuarón and Mike Newell took the other tack, with more success; but Newell's *Goblet of Fire*, while lively, showed the strain of compressing Rowling's ever-more-complex universe to fit a multiplex-friendly 150-minute running time.

Now comes *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix*, the leanest of the Potter movies, compressed from the longest of the books. Gone are subplots and Quidditch matches that only Rowling obsessives will miss, but gone as well are the details that might have made this outing more than a breakneck race to the finish line. It's the first Potter film where you can sense a director's cut hovering just slightly out of sight: New characters are introduced with a single line of dialogue and then shuffled quickly offstage; the camera lingers significantly over actors and artifacts without bothering to identify them; and crucial scenes pass in an eyeblink as the story rushes onward to its war-of-the-wizards finale. The trajectory of

Harry's first love affair, from infatuation to betrayal, merits about five minutes of screen time; a shocking revelation about his father's relationship with the ambiguously malevolent Severus Snape comes and goes too fast to startle anybody; the death of a beloved character, which when encountered on the printed page reduced several twelve-year-olds of my acquaintance to tears, here feels almost like a throw-in, a minor digression just before the credits roll.

All of that said, *The Order of the Phoenix* has many charms to recommend it. The director is David Yates, a veteran of British television, and though he sometimes lapses into a workmanlike style better suited to the small screen, he also summons up his share of enchantments: a brief, God's-eye view of Azkaban Prison; a soaring broomstick ride through downtown London; and a final showdown in a shadowed, subterranean Department of Mysteries, where spells flower like signal flares in the darkness. (These magical battles, all hurtling curses and colliding lightning bolts, grow tedious on the page but play much better on film; nobody wants to read about a fireworks display, but everyone wants to watch it.) Yates's best trick, meanwhile, is a cinematic throwback with a CGI twist. When the movie needs to race through new developments, he updates the old spinning-newspaper device, sending his camera gliding *through* the headlines and the magical, moving-stereoscope illustrations in the *Daily Prophet*, the wizarding world's answer to the *New York Times*.

Meanwhile, the cast delights as usual. The Who's Who of British thespians don't get the screen time they deserve, but the Maggie Smiths and Michael Gambons and Emma Thompsons (the list goes on and on) are pros at making the most of what they have to play with. High marks to Imelda Staunton, as the odious Dolores Umbridge, a petty pink-clad tyrant sent to Hogwarts to enforce the Ministry of Magic's denialist insistence that Lord Voldemort has *not* returned; to Jason Isaacs, playing Lucius Malfoy, Voldemort's disciple, as a man completely serene in his wickedness; and to Gary Oldman, showing a sensitive side as Harry's godfather Sirius Black. Highest marks, as usual, to Alan Rickman's Snape, who seems to *chew* each word before releasing it, and whose character's prominence in the next installment—*The Half-Blood Prince*, due out next year—makes me almost giddy with anticipation.

The child actors, moreover, who often seemed at sea in the early films, are children no longer and much improved as a result. Rupert Grint's Ron Weasley and Emma Watson's Hermione tend to hit a single note but hit it well, while a find named Evanna Lynch steals every scene she's in as the delightfully touched-in-the-head Luna Lovegood. Best of all is Daniel Radcliffe, who at first barely registered as Harry but who has steadily grown up into the role, which he inhabits with the strenuous, sinewy intensity of someone girding himself for the darker days ahead.

Just how dark will those days become? Well, I write these words with 24 hours to go before the final chapter in J. K. Rowling's saga reaches bookshelves—so by the time you encounter this review, dear reader, you'll be better equipped to answer that than I. **NR**

WARNER BROS. PICTURES

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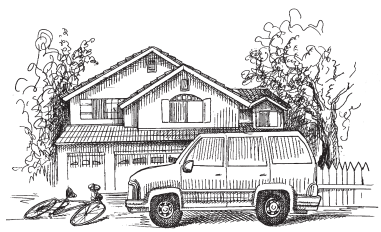
■ THE STRAGGLER ■

Let's Get Physical



JOHN DERBYSHIRE

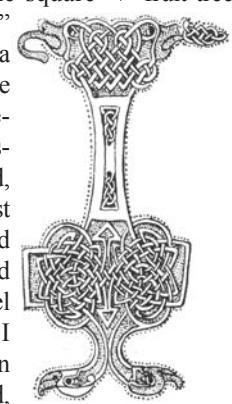
> Work is of two kinds: first, altering the position of matter at or near the earth's surface relatively to other such matter; second, telling other people to do so. The first kind is unpleasant and ill paid; the second is pleasant and highly paid. The second kind is capable of indefinite extension: there are not only those who give orders, but those who give advice as to what orders should be given. Usually two opposite kinds of advice are given simultaneously by two organized bodies of men; this is called politics.
>
> —*In Praise of Idleness*, by Bertrand Russell

THE best relief from thinking about politics, I have found, is to spend some time at the other end of the labor chain, altering the position of matter at or near the earth's surface. Brute physical labor may be unpleasant and ill paid, but it can be mighty therapeutic for those of us who read, write, and think for a living.

The actual matter that needs moving this day is my compost heap, a pile of rich earth and well-rotted vegetable matter shaped like one half of a paraboloid of revolution bisected along the axis by my back fence. The heap is five feet high and twelve across at the base. Some fast mental calculus gives a volume of 150 cubic feet. Soil goes about 50 lb. per cubic foot, so I am looking at close to four tons of soil to be moved from *here* to *there*.

I have no real idea whether turning over one's compost heap is an important part of good gardening practice. To tell the truth, I know next to nothing about gardening. Like many other people with sedentary occupations, though, I set myself regular physical chores to remind my body what it's for. My father used to turn over his compost heap every year, so I follow his example without inquiring into the need. It gets me out of the house for a few hours, lets me work up a virtuous sweat, and offers at least the illusion of having done something useful. And yes, thanks very much, I am fully aware of the hazards of desk-bound middle-aged folk suddenly embarking on strenuous physical tasks. I pace myself carefully, lift with my quads not my back, and spend more time leaning on the shovel contemplating my efforts and sipping iced coffee than actually shoveling.

Shovel, or spade? There is some precise denominative distinction here, like the ones between wasp and hornet, ketch and sloop, or metonymy and synecdoche—one of those too-fine partitionings of reality that I can never hold in my mind for more than a few minutes. This particular implement has a shield-shaped blade affixed to a plain long wooden shaft. I think of it to myself as an American shovel, only because the shovels I grew up with in England all had the square blade and D-shaped "wishbone" handle. My first sighting of a plain-shafted shovel was in the foreground of a photograph, reproduced in some illustrated history of aviation my father owned, showing the Wright brothers' first powered flight. The plain-shafted variety thereupon became, and has remained, an American shovel in my personal lexicon, though I now know that it is common in Ireland and the West of England, too. Probably someone has gained a Ph.D. for research into the geographical distribution of shovel styles. How much there is to know about the world!



I am in fact not at ease with the plain shaft. The English style of shovel was the one handed to me on the first day of my first college-vacation job, as a construction laborer. I was then pointed towards a small mountain of broken-up concrete, alongside which a dump truck was waiting expectantly. It was a hot July day. After an hour of shoveling, I was stripped to the waist and very thirsty. Sometime into the second hour, a kindly navvy came over with a water bottle and showed me the *correct* way to wield an English shovel. You grip the cross-piece of the handle with knuckles downward, rest a knee against the back of your hand, and use the weight of your body to push. This was one of the most useful pieces of knowledge I have ever had imparted to me. With its aid I was able to shovel steadily for a week, filling numberless editions of the dump truck, through a nasty case of sunburn (soothed by lunchtime dips in a nearby branch of the Grand Union Canal, cut 1813–15 by the engineer Benjamin Bevan of Leighton Buzzard and an army of shoveling "navigators") and some sensational palm blisters. At week's end the rubble mountain was at some other region of the earth's surface, and I had been imprinted for life with English shovel technique. The plain-shaft American shovel will never be my friend. Still, like a good immigrant, I persevere with it.

Toiling away now in my back yard, I watch with satisfaction as one pile shrinks and the other grows. There is some art, even in such a simple task. The bottom of the new pile is formed from the top of the old, onto which Mrs. Straggler has dumped some branches pruned from her fruit trees. Care must be taken that these branches don't form cavities at the base of the new pile. One year they did, and rats nested in there, delivering an unpleasant surprise at heap-turning time. Attention also needs to be paid to the shape of the new pile as it grows. One doesn't want an *irregular* compost heap. The triangular stack of old fence posts that keeps the compost from contact with the back fence needs adjusting and augmenting, too. We do nothing significant that requires no thought, no plan, no computation.

This was most men's work—aye, and many women's, too—all through human history. What are the Pyramids, after all, what is the Great Wall of China, but matter whose position at or near the earth's surface has been altered relatively to other such matter? This was my grandfather's work, hacking coal from seams a thousand feet underground and shoveling it into wagons. Would I do it all day, every day, for a living? Not bloody likely. Still, as a break from contemplating the follies at the other end of the labor chain, it is wonderfully refreshing. **NR**

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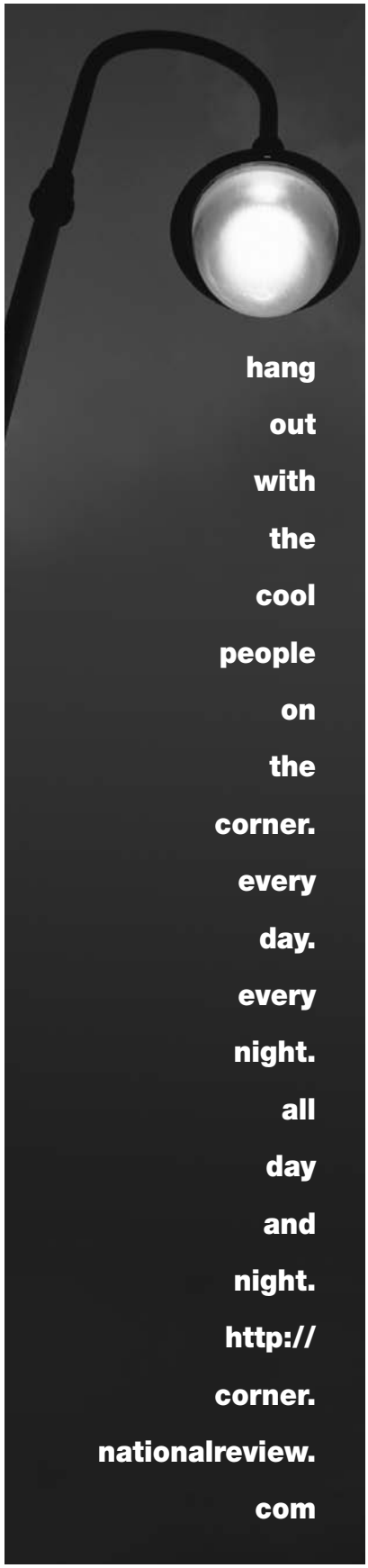

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happy warrior

MARK STEYN

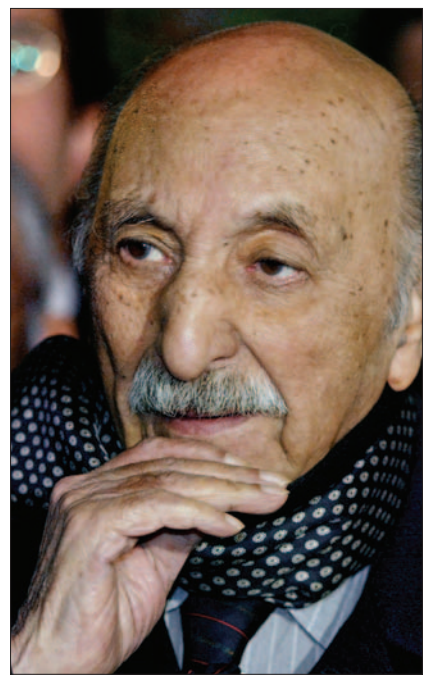
Long Live the King

THE other day King Zahir of Afghanistan died at the age of 92. Sad and all that, but he'd lived a full life. Do you know what a full life in Afghanistan boils down to? Do you realize how unusual it is for anyone in Kabul to die at the age of 92? Male life expectancy in the country is 43.6 years—and not because the wiry lads in the Hindu Kush all expire in mid-jihad or bushkazi match: Female life expectancy is only 43.96 years. That's to say, if you were born in the mid-Sixties, passed through middle school in the disco era, and danced with your teenage sweetheart to George Michael and Duran Duran, you should be dying any day now.

Zahir Shah was older than the average pair of Afghan "seniors" put together. The king came to the throne in 1933, a year which is as remote to the typical Afghan as the Civil War is to us. Back then, the other new rulers on the international scene were President Roosevelt and Herr Hitler. But never mind his coronation, most Afghans weren't even around for his abdication in 1973: The median age in the country is 17.6 years. Even if you survive the appalling childhood mortality rates, eking out three-score-and-ten is the longest of long shots.

If you've ever met Afghan men, you'll know that feeling when you run into some aquiline weathered Pushtun warrior with white hair and a wispy beard framing a leathery old face that wrinkles up every time he smiles. And the old-timer full of ancient folk wisdom from the Khyber Pass turns out to be 38. He looks like Anna Nicole's late husband but at school he was three grades below Demi Moore's boy toy. In such a world, a 92-year-old man is a phenomenon—and, even in his dotage, King Zahir looked healthier than many of the fortysome-things running the country.

In his four-decade reign, neither the British nor the Russians thought him anything special: mediocre chap, ineffectual ruler, no great loss. If any of his subjects shared the realpolitik crowd's condescension, the next 30 years disabused them. When the king returned to Kabul after the fall of the Taliban, his former people took to calling him "Baba"—or "Papa"—and this was eventually formalized into the title "Father of the Nation." In fact, next to your typical Afghan family tree, he was more like the Great-Grandfather of the Nation. In the land of the young, the near-one-century man was no longer king, but his very antiquity and endurance commanded respect. He embodied Afghanistan's last good time. Not that good, but, compared with what came after, decent and civilized and sane. A real live link with a lost world: the early 1970s.



Odds-beater

The Western news announcements of his death didn't really convey his actuarial uniqueness. So imagine that President McKinley survived the unpleasantness in Buffalo and died this month at the age of 164: In relation to his subjects' life expectancy, that was King Zahir. Afghanistan is a land of youth and thus, having very few old people, venerates them. By contrast, the Western world is old—very old, older than any functioning society has ever been. In Italy, schoolhouses built in the 1970s in the expectation of traditional population growth are half-empty. In Spain, the family tree has been turned upside down: Four grandparents have one grandchild. In Germany, 30 percent of women have no children. In Japan, the ob/gyn department is going the way of the buggy-whip factory.

And yet the older we get the more eternally youthful the culture gets. What's hot? What's hip? What's new? What's now? What's *young*? That's what the panjandrums of our culture fret over in strategy meetings for the fall seasons. Movies are about young people, sitcoms are about young people: There are gazillions of comedy shows about cool beautiful youthful types hanging out together, but not a single one about a sexagenarian trying to break into dinner theater in a Florida retirement community. The older our society gets, the younger it tries to pass itself off as. If Afghanistan is a land of youngsters who look like geezers, Europe is a retirement home of perpetual adolescents.

In the Western world, we live in a present-tense culture, and we do so in part because we take continuity for granted. In Afghanistan, continuity is a luxury, a precious anomaly, and the present is nothing if not tense: Zahir's father was killed handing out prizes at a school ceremony. His predecessor had been executed. The predecessor's predecessor lasted three days. And after Zahir came a string of presidents-for-life carried out by the handles in mid-term. The king was toppled by his cousin and brother-in-law Daoud, who was killed by his successor Taraki, who was suffocated by his successor Hafizullah Amin, who was executed by the Soviets, who installed Babrak Karmal, who died in hospital in Moscow and in a radical break with precedent managed to outlive his replacement, Najibullah, whom the Taliban wound up hanging from a traffic light.

The life of the last king of Afghanistan was an act not just of personal but of political longevity. By dying in bed of old, old age in his ramshackle palace, Zahir Shah bucked the odds of a century. He embodied the possibility of continuity: a unique leader's last service to his people. **NR**

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